

EL Education K-5 Language Arts Curriculum

Welcome to EL Education’s new K-5 Language Arts curriculum. This introduction is designed to provide you with key information about how the curriculum is designed and built, and the principles that underlie it. It will also give you a good understanding of what makes this curriculum unique and valuable.

Meet the students

It is 10:15 a.m. on Wednesday, and first-graders Kristina, Elvin, and Omar are hard at work building together. Over the past few weeks in their module lessons, they have spent time every day immersed in *The Most Magnificent Thing*, a rich and complex text about a girl who creates a scooter, which their teacher Ms. Sanchez reads aloud. Now, later in the morning during Labs, Ms. Sanchez helps them learn about tools, and the students work and talk together about how to use various tools and materials to try out designs.

More than a month into this module, Kristina, Elvin, and Omar are collaborating on a “magnificent thing” for their classroom—a lovely box, decorated with their original design, that will hold colored pencils for the class to use. Once the box is complete, each of them will write a paragraph, explaining how they built the magnificent thing and how to use it—and now that they are comfortable with the letters and sounds of written language and can encode them, the first graders are ready for this final supported task.

Down the hall, fourth-graders Nathan, Sergei, and Alma are working just as hard. Over many weeks, their teacher Ms. Henderson has immersed her students in a study of animal defenses and what it takes for animals to survive and thrive. She has helped her students successfully read complex texts about the topic. During her second hour of content-based literacy instruction, the Additional Language and Literacy Block, she also has ensured that students read a lot on their own about animal defenses, and she has made sure her students received much-needed explicit skills instruction and practice.

Ms. Henderson has facilitated intense conversations among her fourth-graders about what might happen to specific animals without their defenses. Dividing the students into small, heterogeneous groups, Ms. Henderson facilitated as her fourth-graders researched three specific animals. Then she gave them specific instruction on narrative writing. Now Nathan, Sergei, and Alma are about to craft choose-your-own-adventure stories about how armadillos use natural defenses to survive and thrive. And during science time, they are digging in to explore the internal and external structures of plants and animals, and how they function.

Kristina, Elvin, and Omar; Nathan, Sergei, and Alma; and all their elementary classmates have been beneficiaries of EL Education’s K-5 Language Arts curriculum. Their engagement, perseverance, and mastery are a snapshot of the realized goals for all children that underlie this comprehensive literacy curriculum.

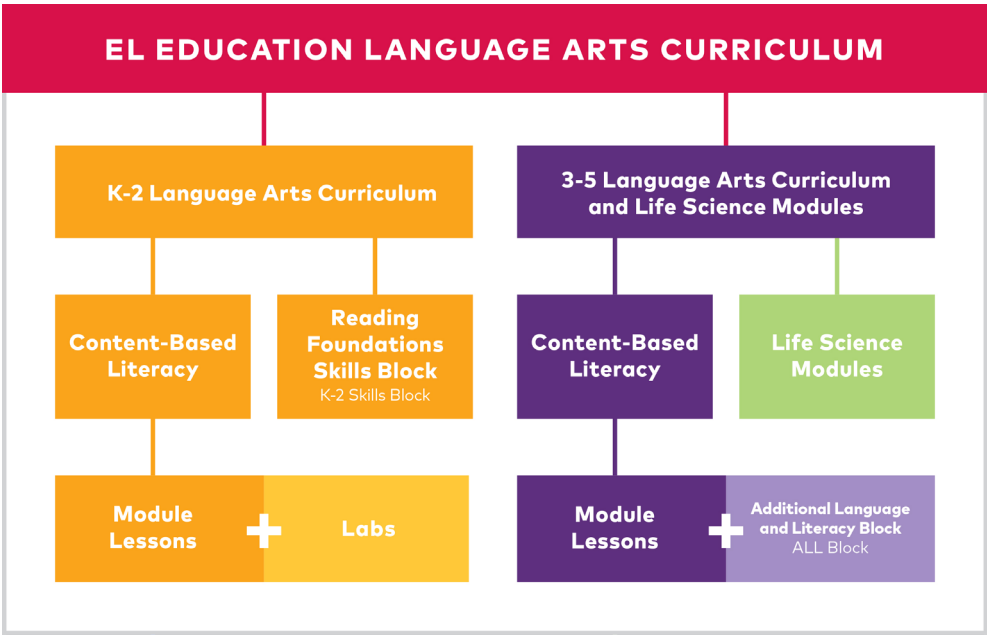
How is the curriculum structured?

Our K-5 curriculum offers either two or three hours of literacy instruction per day, depending on the grade level. The Grades K-2 curriculum offers two hours per day of content-based literacy (*module lessons* and *K-2 Labs*) plus one hour of structured phonics (*K-2 Reading Foundations Skills Block*). All together, these three hours of curriculum are considered comprehensive, meaning that they explicitly teach and formally assess all strands and standards of the Common Core English language arts (ELA) standards for each grade level.

The Grades 3-5 curriculum offers two hours of content-based literacy instruction per day (*module lessons* and the *Additional Language and Literacy [ALL] Block*), with an additional optional companion Life Science Module, which accompanies Module 2 for a third hour of instruction lasting eight to nine weeks. With or without the *Life Science module*, the two hours of content-based literacy are considered comprehensive.

At the heart of the curriculum, at all grade levels, are the hour-long module lessons. Each grade level includes four modules, which span a full school year. The four modules allow students to build important content knowledge based on a compelling topic related to science, social studies, or literature. Each module uses rich, authentic text throughout.

K-2 and 3-5 Comprehensive Literacy¹



What principles underlie the K-5 Language Arts curriculum?

Equity matters

EL Education is fiercely focused on equity for all children. All children deserve schools that foster their unique abilities, give them the real opportunity to achieve high academic standards, and help them take their full place in a society for which they are well prepared when they leave school. Equity is the foundation on which the entire curriculum rests. From this foundation of equity comes what EL Education calls the Dimensions of Student Achievement.

¹Each component of the curriculum is described in detail later in this document.



- **Mastery of knowledge and skills.** Students demonstrate proficiency and deeper understanding, apply their learning, think critically, and communicate clearly.
- **Character.** Students work to become effective learners, to become ethical people, and to contribute to a better world.
- **High-quality work.** Students create complex work, demonstrate craftsmanship, and create authentic work.

These three dimensions are the aspirational outcomes for the entire K-5 Language Arts curriculum. Achievement is more than mastery of knowledge and skills or students' scores on a test. Habits of character and high-quality work are also taught and prized.

Substantive content matters

Research shows that the deeper the content knowledge a student has, the more she is able to understand what she reads, and the more she is able to speak and write clearly about that content. In fact, remarkably, research shows that she is even more able to successfully read about and understand new content.

EL Education's K-5 Language Arts curriculum has been created with substantive content understanding—science, social studies, or literature—at its heart. Students acquire a deepening understanding of that content and they simultaneously acquire all the key literacy standards of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, which have been carefully embedded within the content.

Curriculum is a system

In the K-5 Language Arts curriculum the sequences of skills in the lessons have been carefully designed so that they work together to help students learn. As a whole, the curriculum is a system that benefits students while also providing support to teachers that helps them grow as professionals.

Backward design means planning with the end in mind and assessing all along the way

The guiding principle of backward design is straightforward. Designers must consider three questions:

- “At the end of a sequence of instruction, what will students know and be able to do?”
- “What will proficiency look and sound like?”
- “How will we know when students are proficient?”

An essential aspect of backward planning is assessment. In the module lessons, assessments have been built in to reflect the key literacy learning that students have been acquiring in the lessons. In the K-2 Skills Block, formative assessments happen weekly, so that teachers can group students for precise skill instruction.

In both module lessons and the K-2 Skills Block, daily lessons suggest specific “ongoing assessment.” And although the K-2 Labs and 3-5 ALL Block (each of which are a second hour of content-based literacy instruction) do not include formal assessments (these happen only in the module lessons), they do provide rich opportunities for observing student work and data collection. All of the assessments give teachers valuable information to use, both in working with the lessons and in grouping and emphasis for Labs and the ALL Block.

Students excel in diverse and inclusive settings

EL Education’s K-5 Language Arts curriculum recognizes that students learn from one another—and learn to respect one another—when they learn together in the same classroom. At the same time, students sometimes have needs that require various types of differentiation. The curriculum provides supports and resources for differentiation where needed, within all components of the curriculum: the module lessons, K-2 Labs, 3-5 ALL Block, and the critical K-2 Skills Block.

Teachers are able to provide for students with disabilities as well as students who may need academic extensions. And to engage all students, module lessons heavily emphasize differentiation; tools and scaffolding that support all learners; and flexibility in the ways information is presented, the ways students respond, and in the ways students are engaged (based on Universal Design for Learning).

English language learners (ELLs) and language minority students need their assets honored and their needs supported

ELLs and language minority students bring a wealth of diverse experience and wisdom to the classroom. In EL Education’s curriculum, these language learners are presumed to be fully participating members of a diverse and heterogeneous classroom structure. At the same time, the curriculum honors the fact that language learners need targeted instruction within each lesson and additional supports if they are to be successful.

Specific scaffolds have been integrated into each module lesson so that the classroom teacher can provide myriad supports for these students, particularly for those classified as long-term ELLs. These resources take a variety of forms. Two specific areas of emphasis are the “Language Dives” (conversations that teach students to unpack the structure and meaning of complex sentences) and “Conversation Cues” (see below).

Conversation Cues promote student thinking, collaboration, and respect

Collaborative conversation—frequent, focused, exploratory—is a key tool for deep learning. Through collaborative conversation, students deepen their learning and come to appreciate the value of one another as individuals with diverse perspectives. Conversation Cues (questions that teachers can ask, such as “Can you say more about that?” or “Can you figure out why?”) encourage productive and equitable conversation. These simple talk moves help students extend their thinking.²

Students own their learning

From the earliest grades, students using EL Education’s curriculum learn to see themselves as active learners with agency in their own education. With teachers’ guidance, they articulate specific learning targets (“I can...”) for every lesson. They learn to set goals; assess their own learning; and use feedback from peers, themselves, and their teachers to make progress.

² Conversation Cues are adapted from Michaels, Sarah and O’Connor, Cathy. Talk Science Primer. Cambridge, MA: TERC, 2012. http://inquiryproject.terc.edu/shared/pd/TalkScience_Primer.pdf. Based on Chapin, S., O’Connor, C., and Anderson, N. [2009]. Classroom Discussions: Using Math Talk to Help Students Learn, Grades K–6. Second Edition. Sausalito, CA: Math Solutions Publications).

Families and guardians are partners

EL Education's curriculum welcomes students' families and guardians as partners in education. Students learn best when families have the opportunity to be part of the educational journey. The curriculum includes sample letters teachers can send home to describe what students will learn during a given module, how guardians can support that learning and, for Grades 3-5, specific homework assignments. Students are encouraged to share what they are learning with their family, and sometimes interview family members about their expertise and experiences.

Curriculum as powerful professional development

This curriculum is designed to help teachers build on their existing expertise and continue to improve their ability to make strong instructional decisions during planning and while teaching. Teachers are provided rich resources and opportunities to make sound and specific instructional decisions based on their students' needs.

How does EL Education's curriculum address Common Core State Standards for literacy?

EL Education's curriculum was created to teach the Common Core literacy standards with a fully content-integrated approach, recognizing as well that the content students acquire is itself a steppingstone to full literacy. Emphasis within the new standards includes:

Reading Standards

TEXT COMPLEXITY	Frequent use of grade-appropriate complex text at all grade levels for all students; at the K-2 level many close read-alouds are conducted with texts two or three grade levels above what students can read on their own to encourage high-level thinking and discourse; scaffolds so that all students are successful; Language Dives for all students (more frequent for ELLs); story time to launch every K-2 Lab session
VOCABULARY	Intentional vocabulary building from content-based text; attention to figuring out words from context; decoding; emphasis on academic (Tier 2) vocabulary
CLOSE READING	Teacher-led close reading or close read-alouds of content-based texts; carefully developed text-dependent questions; multiple reads for deepening comprehension; focus question that drives a series of sessions on a single text
VOLUME OF READING	Daily Accountable Independent Reading at each individual student's level (or rereading complex text previously read with teacher support); reading to deepen and expand content knowledge and vocabulary; story time to launch every K-2 Lab session
RESEARCH	Gathering evidence for knowledge building before writing; Accountable Independent Reading; K-2 Research Lab
FLUENCY	Multiple reads of complex text; research reading; volume of reading; reading decodable texts (in the K-2 Reading Foundations Skills Block)
FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS	A dedicated hour per day to explicitly teach the letter-sound patterns of the English language (in the K-2 Reading Foundations Skills Block)

Writing Standards

WRITING REFLECTS CONTENT UNDERSTANDING	All writing supports content knowledge: Students write both as they are learning content knowledge (e.g., note-taking) and as they synthesize that knowledge (e.g., in their formal writing); note-taking in the K-2 Research Lab
SPECIFIC INSTRUCTION IN ASPECTS OF WRITING	Writing skills (e.g., use of introductions, transitions) and approaches (e.g., gathering evidence to support a statement) are scaffolded specifically for particular writing in each module
WRITING FLUENCY, EASE WITH WRITING	Frequent “short writes” as well as more developed pieces; almost daily writing in the K-2 module lessons; goal-setting and reflection in the K-2 Labs; writing practice as one specific component of the 3-5 Additional Language and Literacy Block
ORAL PROCESSING OF IDEAS BEFORE WRITING	Frequent opportunities for students to “orally rehearse” ideas and thinking before writing, including structured conversations and Language Dives
WRITING PROCESS (PLAN, DRAFT, CONFER, REVISE, EDIT)	Instruction and scaffolding in each aspect of the writing process; emphasis on use of models, critique (kind, specific, and helpful), feedback, and revision

Language Standards

STANDARD GRAMMAR AND USAGE	Short and fully developed writing (including emphasis on revising and editing skills); explicit instruction on specific language standards in K-2 module lessons (often involving analyzing or punctuating songs and poems) and in 3-5 Additional Language and Literacy Block; Language Dives; embedded grammar and usage instruction (within performance tasks and often within other writing assignments)
STANDARD WRITING CONVENTIONS, INCLUDING SPELLING	Short and fully developed writing (including emphasis on revising and editing skills); focus on letter formation and spelling patterns in K-2 Reading Foundations Skills Block; explicit instruction on conventions in K-5 module lessons and the 3-5 Additional Language and Literacy Block (grammar, usage, and mechanics component); Language Dives
ACADEMIC AND DOMAIN-SPECIFIC VOCABULARY	Multiple reads of complex text; short and fully developed writing; Language Dives; unpacking learning targets; explicit teaching of the language of habits of character (e.g., collaboration, perseverance)

Speaking and Listening Standards

PARTICIPATION IN DISCUSSION, BUILDING ON OTHERS' IDEAS	Collaborative protocols; small group discussion; discussion norms; Conversation Cues; sentence frames to scaffold productive discussion
PRESENTATION OF IDEAS IN A STYLE APPROPRIATE TO AUDIENCE	Presentation of students' work, both formally and informally, to an audience of their peers, families, or invited guests

The K-2 Language Arts Curriculum

John Dewey, education icon, famously said, “Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.” Our curriculum for primary learners reflects that truth. Young children live in a world of activity, exploration, creation, singing, talk, and play. These ways of living—with the encouragement of loving and supportive adults—give young learners both meaning and joy. As they move, sing, explore new ideas, make stuff, talk endlessly about what they are doing, and repeat songs and poems over and over again, primary children are learning. Our curriculum is rich and academically challenging, and it is built with what EL describes as the “Characteristics of Primary Learners” at its core:

- Young children find security in rhythm, ritual, and repetition.
- Young children learn through play.

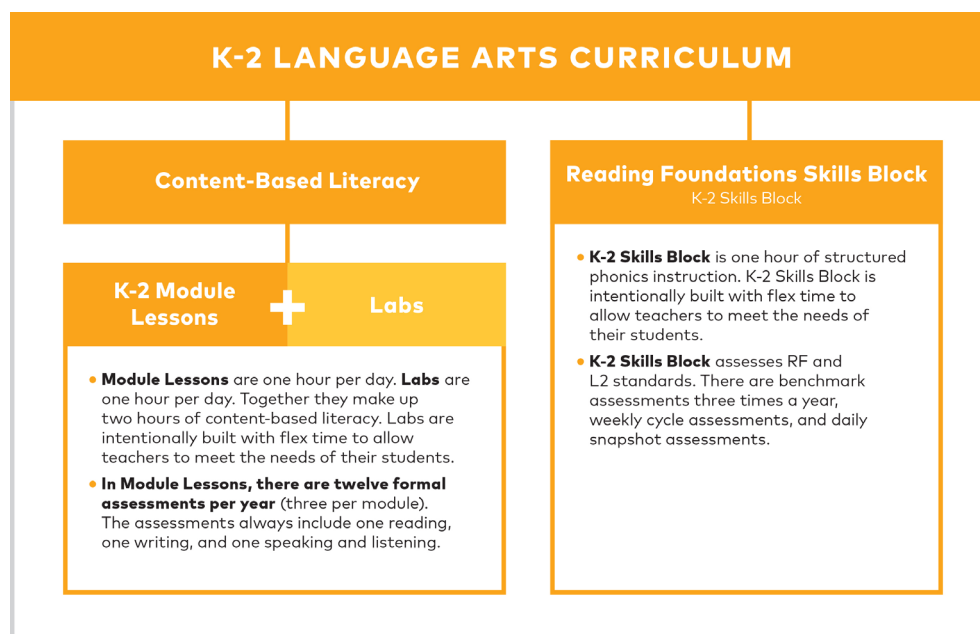
- Young children want to belong to a community that is safe, beautiful, and good.
- Young children explore the world with wonder.
- Young children “understand” the world first through their bodies.
- Young children seek independence and mastery.
- Young children thrive in the natural world.
- Young children use stories to construct meaning.
- Young children seek patterns in the world around them.
- Young children construct their identities and build cultural bridges.
- Young children express themselves in complex ways.

The K-2 curriculum offers three hours of rich literacy instruction per day:

- Two hours of content-based literacy
 - One hour of module lessons
 - One hour of Labs
- A third hour of structured phonics:
 - One hour of the K-2 Reading Foundations Skills Block (addresses the Foundational Reading standards as well as Language Standards 1 and 2)

These three hours of curriculum are considered *comprehensive*, explicitly teaching and formally assessing all strands and standards of the Common Core ELA standards for each grade level. Taken as a whole, this rigorous and joyful literacy curriculum is designed to ensure that all children have a genuine opportunity to grow and succeed.

EL Education’s K–2 Comprehensive Literacy: Structure

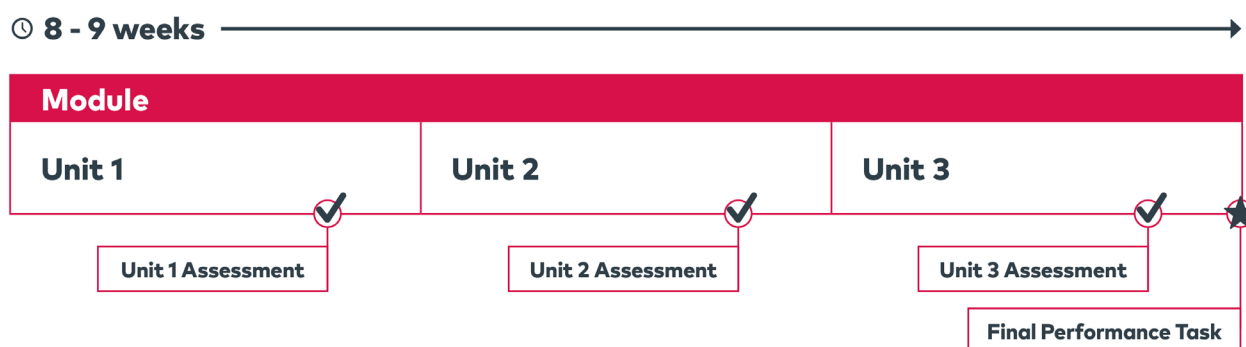


K-2 Content-Based Literacy: Module Lessons and Labs

The Module Lessons

Across K-5, students experience four modules over the course of a school year. In K-2, Module 1 is a bit shorter (six weeks rather than eight), so teachers have time to do the other important work of getting classroom routines and culture in place, which often takes more time and deliberate attention for primary-aged students. (Note: For more, see the “Fostering Character in a Collaborative Classroom” section of the Module 1 Appendix.) Each module has a consistent structure of three units, each of which includes one formal assessment.

EL Education’s K-2 Language Arts: Module Lessons, Including Assessment Structure



The curriculum was built using the principles of backward design, meaning that we started by identifying what we wanted students to know and be able to do at the end of each module, and then we built each unit to intentionally get them there. Let’s explore what that means in the first grade classroom introduced in the Snapshot at the beginning of this chapter.

The last unit of each module, **Unit 3**, culminates with a performance task. This is where Kristina, Elvin, and Omar have created their “magnificent thing” and are writing about it, bringing together what they know about tools, collaboration, and perseverance (and magnificent things!).

What students learn in Units 1 and 2 helps them prepare for this performance task. (This is the principle of “backward design” in action.)

In **Unit 1**, students read, sing, discuss, dramatize, draw, and write to acquire strong content knowledge as well as the literacy skills that they need to do so. Ms. Sanchez’s first graders read informational texts to learn about lots of tools and the jobs each tool does. They learn how to ask and answer questions about the many texts they work with. They learn to collaborate and converse with one another, capturing their thinking in pictures and words.

Several weeks later, in **Unit 2**, they begin work with “close reading” of a complex text, *The Most Magnificent Thing*. In primary grades, this close reading happens through hearing the text read aloud (i.e., a close read-aloud). Ms. Sanchez uses a close read-aloud guide to conduct a series of sessions (across multiple lessons) that invite students to analyze and discuss this rich literary text. Students become deeply familiar with what a “magnificent thing” might be and what sorts of habits of character (such as perseverance) the girl in the story needed to make such a thing. Few first grade students can read the text independently, yet they all come to know it deeply, and to internalize its language, syntax, and meaning—reading comprehension at its best. During the module lessons in this unit, students also do a series of design challenges that give them hands-on experience with collaborative problem solving.

As the lessons in each unit progress, Ms. Sanchez regularly checks in on her students’ progress. Each unit has a standards-based assessment built in. Here, students read, write, or speak with increasing independence about the

texts they have been working with. These assessments help Ms. Sanchez in two ways: They allow her to have a clear sense of what her students can do and cannot yet do, and they give her valuable information about how best to use the time in the K-2 Labs for her students' benefit.

Almost every day, K-2 students share songs and poems. These serve many functions: They give students cues about transitions from activity to activity, help build a positive classroom community, build fluency, give students opportunities to practice specific language standards, and give students a deep schema for rhythm and syntax. And, they are joyful.

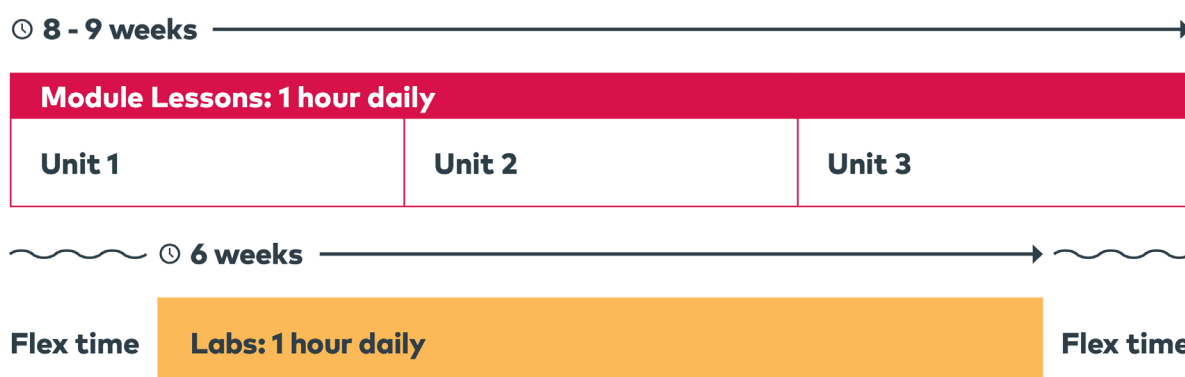
This unfolding of the three units means that by **Unit 3**, when the performance task is introduced, Kristina, Elvin, Omar, and their classmates are fully equipped to create their “magnificent things” and to synthesize their understanding of what they accomplished through supported, standards-based writing.

The K-2 Labs

Labs are an important feature of the K-2 curriculum because they support and extend student learning from the module lessons. They are designed to help teachers ensure that all of their students get the time to play and explore, become immersed in oral language and content knowledge, and practice skills and habits of character that they need—both to live joyfully and to be fully successful and proficient.

The K-2 Labs are one hour long and are complementary to module lessons. These two hours of content-based literacy instruction work together to accelerate the achievement of all students.

K-2 Content-Based Literacy: Module Lessons and Labs



The K-2 Labs are designed for six weeks of instruction within an eight- to nine-week module. This design allows teachers to use their discretion to flexibly schedule the Labs to best meet the needs of their students. Teachers may choose to spend that hour during those additional two to three weeks on such things as solidifying structures and routines, providing additional “spill-over” time to support module lessons, providing additional instructional time for ELLs, or for additional explicit language instruction.

Keep in mind, this is an intentionally brief description of the Labs—for more, see the separate “Implementing the K-2 Labs” introduction to your Labs Teacher Guide and Supporting Materials book.

Key Features of the K-2 Module Lessons and K-2 Labs

- **Emphasis on habits of character.** Character is one of EL Education’s Three Dimensions of Student Achievement. Collaboration, perseverance, a growth mindset, and being able to set goals and then reflect on them all are key aspects of strong social-emotional learning. They are critical to student success, in school and in life.

- **Emphasis on oral language development.** Interactive, conversational immersion in oral language in the early years is critically important for children’s literacy development. Primary students build important oral language (vocabulary and syntax) and listening habits that will be key to their development of literacy. Module lessons include explicit focus on the speaking and listening standards. And the Labs provide opportunities for students to use content-specific and academic vocabulary and apply the speaking and listening skills taught in the module lessons.
- **Daily work with rich, complex text and volume of reading.** The module lessons are built around close read-alouds of complex text. In addition, each day in the K-2 Labs begins with “Story Time”—a read-aloud chosen for its relationship to the content or character focus of the Labs—so students are consistently immersed in rich, meaningful, content-connected language. This frequent work with rich text broadens content knowledge and develops students’ schema about text structure and author’s craft.
- **Daily student goal-setting and reflection.** Module lessons include learning targets, which are student-friendly “I can” statements that help students know where they are headed with their learning. Teachers help students check back in with their progress toward learning targets during lessons. Similarly, at the start of each Lab, students set personal goals. Each day at the end of Labs, they have time to reflect on their learning. As they reflect, students are developing their executive functioning skills—their ability to think about what they are doing, name it, and begin to make more intentional decisions.
- **Culminating performance task.** Unit 3 of the module lessons culminates with a student performance task. Students get support to synthesize and transfer their knowledge and understanding from the module—in terms of both content and literacy—in an authentic and often collaborative task. This is scaffolded with models, drafts, critique, and revision to lead to high-quality work.
- **Assessment.** Both summative and formative assessments are integral. In each module, three formal summative assessments are built in (one per unit). Formative “ongoing” assessment happens frequently, as teachers observe, use checklists, and give feedback to students in module lessons and Labs. There are no formal summative assessments in the K-2 Labs.

K-2 Structured Phonics: Reading Foundations Skills Block

Our curriculum is comprehensive. The module lessons and K-2 Labs immerse primary students in content-based literacy. These two components of the curriculum complement each other to give students strong, active literacy instruction grounded in compelling topics. The K-2 Reading Foundations Skills Block gives K-2 students another hour per day of essential structured phonics instruction to help them crack the alphabetic code.

We know that in order to become fully literate, all children must acquire internalized, automatic knowledge of the building blocks of spoken and written language—letter names, sounds, and formation; the ability to break words apart and blend them back together; common spelling patterns; and decoding of words. In addition, students must develop automaticity around reading. They need to internalize predictably patterned words in context (so that the words become sight words) and smoothly and accurately read basic sentence patterns—and, increasingly, texts. Learning these building blocks of written language gives students the “mental bandwidth” to pay attention to the meaning of text and improves their reading comprehension.

The skills described in the above paragraph are the central purpose of the K-2 Reading Foundations Skills Block. It is not designed primarily for reading comprehension—that is the job of the module lessons and K-2 Labs. However, *fluency and automaticity are in fact directly related to reading comprehension*. Young students (such as the first-graders Kristina, Elvin, and Omar) who have to spend time and energy figuring out many words in a text do not have the “mental bandwidth” left to pay attention to the text’s meaning. Because the purpose of reading, after all, is comprehension, the K-2 Skills Block is designed to give students the building blocks of written language, and to help them develop fluency and automaticity in reading.

The structure of the K-2 Reading Foundations Skills Block

The K-2 Skills Block is organized by cycles, most of which include five lessons. Each day:

- Students spend 15–20 minutes in a “whole group” work session.
- Students spend 40–45 minutes in differentiated small groups, based on their strengths and needs.

Here, we briefly explain the purpose of the differentiated small group time. During small group time in the weekly cycle, students have regular opportunities to work with the teacher. When they are not working with the teacher, they work independently in various ways, including accountable independent reading.

These small groups are key to how the K-2 Skills Block works. They allow the teacher to tailor instruction, precisely, to the specific needs of each beginning reader, so that those students are able to progress as smoothly as possible.

Students develop foundational skills in “phases” of reading and spelling development and word acquisition. EL Education’s curriculum is designed to help teachers identify what phase each student is in and then to give students specific instruction in mastering each phase. (This framework is based on the work of Dr. Linnea Ehri, an educational psychologist who has researched how learners crack the alphabetic code.)

Phases of Reading and Spelling Development

Pre-Alphabetic	Partial Alphabetic	Full Alphabetic	Consolidated Alphabetic
Reader is not yet making any alphabetic connections. May recognize some letters (e.g., letters in own name) and environmental print (e.g., “Stop” on stop sign).	Reader is making partial alphabetic connections. Beginning to decode and encode CVC and VC words, but frequently confuses vowels and vowel sounds.	Reader is making full alphabetic connections. Able to decode and encode all regularly spelled, one-syllable words and some multisyllabic words.	Reader uses knowledge of syllable types to decode and encode multisyllabic words. Continually growing bank of high-frequency and irregularly spelled words.

For more details on differentiated small group time and the Phases of Reading and Spelling Development, see the “Implementing the K-2 Reading Foundations Skills Block” introduction to your Module 1 Skills Block Teacher Guide and Supporting Materials book, as well as the Phases and Microphases description found in the K-2 Skills Block Resource Manual.

Key features of the K-2 Reading Foundations Skills Block

- **Focus on spelling.** Decoding and encoding go hand-in-hand, each skill strengthening the other. The ability to write the letters that represent sounds in words helps the writer commit the pronunciation of the word to memory.
- **Honoring characteristics of primary learners.** Primary students learn through play and predictable routines. The K-2 Skills Block promotes a joyful, active learning environment by incorporating music, movement, stories, and use of multiple modalities.
- **Additional time and support for students who need it, including targeted re-teaching.** We know that all students do not learn at the same rate, and that some students need more time, repetition, and direct instruction than others. The differentiated small group instruction allows teachers to spend more time and provide more support to students who need it. Suggested re-teaching activities and guidance for differentiated small groups and planning are provided in each lesson.

Note: To implement the K-2 Skills Block, refer to your Differentiation Packs if you have identified students who need instruction above or below their grade level. These materials will support your differentiated small group.

- **Variety of student-friendly texts.** In addition to the content-related texts used in the K-2 Labs and module lessons, the K-2 Skills Block includes a variety of texts within the lessons, including poems, Letter Stories for each letter of the alphabet, fluency passages, and engaging Decodable Student Readers. To set purpose for the Decodable Student Reader, the teacher also reads aloud an “engagement” text, a complex text with an interesting story that is mirrored in the decodable text. Lastly, there is also time set aside daily for students to read texts of their choice from the classroom library.
- **Assessment.** Both summative and formative assessments are integral. The K-2 Skills Block includes three types of assessments: *benchmark assessments* (fall, winter, spring).³ This gives the teacher a good sense of where her students are in terms of the alphabetic phases, described above. *Cycle assessments* serve as efficient dipsticks at the end of each week. These give the teacher more specific information to help her decide how to group students for specific small group instruction during the next cycle. There are also daily ongoing *snapshot* assessments in kindergarten and Grade 1, and Exit Tickets in Grade 2.

The Grades 3-5 Language Arts Curriculum

Just like primary-age students, upper-elementary students are joy seekers. They crave collaboration with their peers and engagement in their learning through play, story, and games. They also have unique needs and characteristics. Their growing hunger for independence and mastery as learners makes them ready to put their hard-earned reading and writing skills to work.

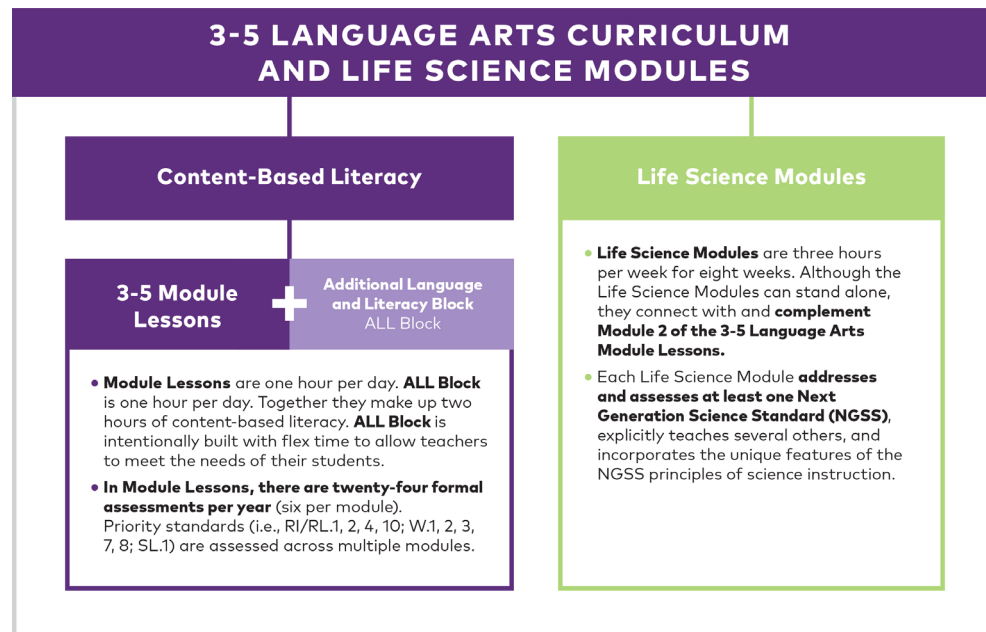
Our Grades 3-5 curriculum honors students’ growing capacity to read complex text, write at length and with depth, and explore pressing issues in the world around them. The curriculum comprises two hours of rich content-based literacy instruction per day:

- One hour of module lessons
- One hour of the Additional Language and Literacy (ALL) Block

These two hours of curriculum are considered *comprehensive*, explicitly teaching and formally assessing all strands and standards of the Common Core ELA standards for each grade level (Note: In Grades 3-5, the initial exposure to and formal assessment of standards happens in the module lessons; the ALL Block is for additional practice.) There is also an optional companion Life Science Module that accompanies Module 2 and comprises eight weeks of instruction.

³ If teachers prefer to use existing screening or diagnostic assessments in lieu of the three benchmark assessments, that is possible, as long as they are aligned with the appropriate standards.

3-5 Comprehensive Literacy

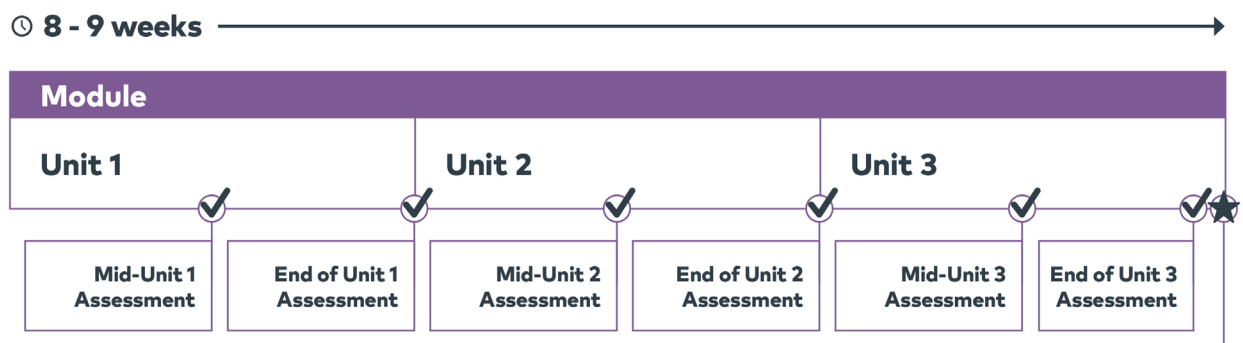


Grades 3-5 Content-Based Literacy: Module Lessons and the Additional Language and Literacy Block

The Module Lessons

In many ways, the Grades 3-5 curriculum is similar to the K-2 curriculum. The modules are based on compelling topics and use rich, authentic text throughout. Divided into three units each, the modules are designed to build important content knowledge and understanding, as they fully teach and assess all of the ELA standards at each grade level. As in K-2, each module has a consistent structure of three units. But unlike K-2, in Grades 3-5 there are two assessments per unit, which reflects the readiness of students this age to do more independent work and to practice with high-stakes testing formats.

Grades 3-5 Module Lessons and Assessment Structure



The curriculum was built using the principles of backward design, meaning that we started by identifying what we wanted students to know and be able to do at the end of each module and then built each unit to intentionally get them there. Let's explore what that means in the fourth grade classroom introduced in the Snapshot at the beginning of this document.

The last unit of each module, **Unit 3**, includes the performance task: an extended, supported writing task or presentation where students need to successfully bring together what they know about this topic. This is where students Nathan, Sergei, and Alma are writing choose-your-own-adventure narratives, bringing together what they know about the armadillo and what defenses it has to help it survive (and what they know about writing).

If this is what students need to be prepared to do in Unit 3 of the module, what they learn in Units 1 and 2 must help them get there. (This is the principle of “backward design” in action.)

In **Unit 1**, students read, discuss, dramatize, draw, and write so that they acquire strong and specific content and background knowledge, as well as the literacy skills that they need to do so. Ms. Henderson’s fourth graders learn what “natural defenses” are, they learn what predators do, and they learn about the many kinds of defenses that animals have depending on their habitat. In the process, the students learn to read closely, reread carefully for meaning, gather evidence, and develop a paragraph.

In **Unit 2**, they take this basic understanding to a deeper level. They do more research and discuss with one another what defenses specific animals might have. With close support, they respond to a prompting question to write a full multi-paragraph essay about animal defenses.

Throughout, for homework, students are reading independently at their own level. They are using research texts to gather deeper and deeper knowledge about how animals use natural defenses to survive and thrive.

As the lessons in each unit progress, Ms. Henderson has the opportunity to carefully check in on her students’ progress. Each unit has two built-in assessments: a mid-unit assessment (usually reading) and an end of unit assessment (usually writing). These assessments help Ms. Henderson in two ways: They allow her to have a clear sense of what her students can and cannot yet do, and they give her valuable information about how best to use the time in the ALL Block for her students’ benefit.

This structure and sequence means that, by **Unit 3**, Nathan, Sergei, Alma, and all of their classmates are fully equipped to write their choose-your-own adventures about how the armadillo uses its defenses to survive.

The Additional Language and Literacy (ALL) Block

The ALL Block is one hour long and is complementary to module lessons. These two hours of content-based literacy instruction work together to accelerate the achievement of all students.

The ALL Block has three units, parallel to the three units of the module. Each module unit is accompanied by two weeks of ALL Block instruction (with one flex day built in every week). When a particular unit of the module lessons runs longer than two weeks, the ALL Block hour during those days that extend beyond two weeks is flex time, used to meet the specific needs of students. For example, teachers might want to provide additional time for work started in module lessons, practicing literacy skills introduced there that students are finding particularly challenging, informally assessing reading foundational skills, or offering additional time for ELLs.

Grades 3-5 Content-Based Literacy: Module Lessons and Additional Language and Literacy Block

🕒 **8 - 9 weeks** →

Module Lessons: 1 hour daily		
Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3

Additional Language and Literacy Block: 1 hour daily					
Unit 1	~Flex time~	Unit 2	~Flex time~	Unit 3	~Flex time~

🕒 **2 weeks** →

🕒 **2 weeks** →

🕒 **2 weeks** →

The ALL Block has five components:

- Independent Reading
- Additional Work with Complex Text
- Reading and Speaking Fluency/GUM (grammar, usage, mechanics)
- Writing Practice
- Word Study and Vocabulary

Each component is built into the module lessons in various ways, and then is reinforced and practiced in the ALL Block. Over the course of two weeks, students work with all five components.

Keep in mind, this is an intentionally brief description of the ALL Block—for more, see the “Implementing the ALL Block” introduction to your Module 1 ALL Block Teacher Guide and Supporting Materials book.

Key Features of the Grades 3-5 Module Lessons and ALL Block

- **Regular close reading of complex texts.** Students in Grades 3-5 consistently read complex text to gain both deeper content knowledge of the topic and deeper familiarity with the structures, syntax, and vocabulary of complex text.
- **Writing for understanding.** As students write to show understanding of particular content, they both synthesize that content and acquire transferable skills and approaches to new writing situations, becoming more independent writers.
- **Habits of character.** Character is one of EL Education’s Three Dimensions of Student Achievement. Collaboration, perseverance, a growth mindset, and being able to set goals and then reflect on them are all key aspects of strong social-emotional development and are critical to student success, in school and in life. To help students become independent learners, the 3-5 curriculum continues to build in frequent opportunities for students to collaborate and reflect on their learning.
- **Robust instruction for ELLs.** Throughout the module lessons and the ALL Block, English language learners are provided specific and differentiated instruction and support. In the module lessons, ELLs are usually part of the overall heterogeneous grouping in the class. In the ALL Block, there is a strategic mix of heterogeneous grouping as well as ELL-only grouping to meet specific needs.

- **Building knowledge and literacy skills through a volume of reading.** Students have many opportunities to read a lot on the module topic. This results in stronger vocabulary, stronger content knowledge, and greater ability to write in depth about content.
- **Daily student goal-setting and reflection.** The module lessons and the ALL Block include learning targets, which are student-friendly “I can” statements that help students know where they are headed with their learning. Teachers help students check back in with their progress during lessons.
- **Sufficient practice of skills for students to demonstrate mastery.** In both the module lessons and the ALL Block, all students receive consistent, specific, and differentiated skills practice, in both reading and writing.
- **Culminating performance task.** Unit 3 of each module culminates with a student performance task. Students get support in synthesizing and transferring their knowledge and understanding from the module, in terms of both content and literacy, in an authentic and often collaborative task. This is scaffolded with models, drafts, critique, and revision to lead to high-quality work.
- **Assessment.** Both summative and formative assessments are integral. In each module, six summative assessments are built in (two per unit). Formative assessment happens frequently as teachers observe, collect homework, use checklists, and give feedback to students in the module lessons and in the ALL Block.

Grades 3-5 Curriculum: Life Science Modules

Our Grades 3-5 curriculum includes one optional Life Science module per grade level. If schools choose to teach this optional module, it will represent three additional hours per week of instruction but only during Module 2, which is approximately eight to nine weeks. Although the Life Science modules can stand alone, each one connects with and complements Module 2 of the grade-level language arts module lessons.

Table 2.2: Grades 3-5 Life Science Modules

Grade	Life Science Module
3	Diverse life cycles and inheritance of traits in aquatic plants and animals: This module extends learning about frogs from the ELA module.
4	Ecosystems and specialized structures and their functions in terrestrial plants and animals: This module is a companion to animal defenses in the ELA module.
5	The cycle of energy and matter in a healthy forest ecosystem: This module extends learning about rainforests from the ELA module.

Science is about asking questions, observing carefully, investigating, reflecting, and then drawing conclusions based on evidence. Our Life Science modules for Grades 3-5 are designed to provide teachers and students with an inquiry-based approach to rigorous and authentic science instruction.

Each Life Science module is designed to last eight weeks, with about three hours of science instruction per week. Each addresses and assesses at least one Next Generation Science Standard (NGSS), explicitly teaches several others, and incorporates the unique features of the NGSS principles of science instruction.

The Life Science modules have been designed for the elementary school generalist, such as Ms. Henderson. Each module gives the regular classroom teacher the plans, the background content, and the resources she needs to provide strong, rigorous, literacy-integrated science instruction. For the classroom teacher, the goal of our science curriculum is to recognize that science can be fun—both to learn and to teach.

Three-Dimensional Science Instruction

The Next Generation Science Standards reflect a significant shift from earlier science instruction. Each of the NGSS standards is described in terms of a performance expectation: What should a student know and be able to do with that particular science concept at the end of instruction? In addition to naming a specific performance expectation, each science standard is described in terms of three dimensions. These three dimensions are a key structure of the NGSS and shouldn't be confused with EL Education's three Dimensions of Student Achievement.

The Three Dimensions of the Next Generation Science Standards

Science and Engineering Practices	Disciplinary Core Ideas	Cross-Cutting Concepts
Students ask questions and define problems related to the topic. They make explanatory models and revise them as they learn more. They set up investigations, gather evidence, and make thoughtful claims supported by reasoning, both orally and in writing.	This is the actual content and information that students are learning about a topic. In the EL Education Life Science modules, the content is some aspect of life science, depending on the grade. This knowledge functions as the anchor of the module.	Students learn that there are ways of thinking and underlying “big ideas” that are not specific to a topic (or even to science) that extend across and through many topics. This includes ideas like “systems,” patterns, and cause-effect relationships. They are the “glue” that holds ideas together.

Key Features of the Grades 3-5 Life Science Modules

- **Science notebooks.** From the beginning of the module, each student keeps an interactive science notebook and uses it every day. Modeled after the way “real scientists” use notebooks, these are set up for students to include both a prompting question for the particular lesson sequence and space for students to think and work.
- **Scientists Meetings.** Scientists Meetings occur at least once a week. They give students the opportunity to translate their thinking into language in a way that can be shared with others and revisited over time. Talking about ideas allows students to reconsider and revise their developing ideas as they listen to classmates.
- **Flexible time for lessons.** Unlike the ELA components of the curriculum, which are one hour long, the time allotted for each lesson sequence of a Life Science module is flexible. The teacher is encouraged to plan science instruction on a weekly, not daily, basis, and adjust times for investigations as needed.
- **Self-coaching prompts for teachers.** Many elementary generalists may lack confidence in teaching science. Every lesson includes questions for the teacher to consider in order to help guide student inquiry, reflect on what students know and need, and anticipate classroom management needs.
- **ELA Standards.** The standards that are so central to the language arts module lessons are central to the Life Science Modules as well. Students engage in close reading of complex texts and acquire and use key academic and domain vocabulary. They discuss and process their understanding in frequent guided conversation in Scientists Meetings, and they write arguments and scientific explanations supported by accurate, reasoned evidence.

For specific information on the 3-5 Life Science Modules, see the Life Science Module Teacher Guide and Supporting Materials book.

Additional Documents to Orient to the K-5 Language Arts Curriculum

The following pages describe other guidance documents that are crucial to have the big picture, year-long context when beginning to implement EL Education’s K-5 curriculum.

General Resources	
K-2 CURRICULUM PLAN AND 3-5 CURRICULUM PLAN	High-level overviews of the recommended sequencing and pacing of topics, writing texts, and required texts for each grade. Signal key aspects of vertical alignment (K-2 and 3-5). Show the four modules per year for each grade level.
K-5 GRADE-LEVEL CURRICULUM MAPS	The single best source to understand the year’s work for each grade level: a detailed view of the scope and sequence of the modules showing module titles, topics, targets, and standards taught and assessed in each module.
K-5 REQUIRED TRADE BOOK PROCUREMENT LIST	Lists all trade books that districts must purchase to implement the modules. For each text, specifies the number of copies needed (e.g., one per classroom, six per classroom, or one per student).
K-5 RECOMMENDED TEXTS AND OTHER RESOURCES	Lists trade books, websites, and videos on the module topics for students to read independently in order to build content knowledge. Includes texts at a range of reading levels so teachers can differentiate.
K-2 LABS SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS LIST	Lists the physical materials needed to implement K-2 Labs. Note that schools may already have many of these materials (e.g., cardboard, paints).
3-5 LIFE SCIENCE SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS LIST	Lists the physical materials needed to implement the Grades 3-5 Life Science Modules. Note that schools may already have many of these materials (e.g., eye-droppers).
FOSTERING CHARACTER IN A COLLABORATIVE CLASSROOM	Describes what EL Education means by “habits of character” (e.g., perseverance, collaboration) and how the curriculum promotes social-emotional learning. Includes specific suggestions for setting up the classroom environment, structures, and culture that will help this curriculum succeed, including how teachers can lay the foundation in the first few weeks of school, before starting Module 1.
SUPPORTING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS	Includes the principles of instruction for ELLs and how the curriculum structure supports the principles of ELLs’ cultural and linguistic needs.
SAMPLE SCHEDULES	Shows various options for scheduling the time for comprehensive literacy: three hours per day (K-2) and two hours per day (3-5). Each sample schedule states advantages and considerations.
IMPLEMENTING THE K-2 LABS	A description of the purpose and structure of the K-2 Labs. Describes the five Labs and explains how Labs unfold across a module. Explains what a typical Lab session looks like in action. Answers frequently asked questions.
VIDEOS: PROTOCOLS WITH PRIMARY LEARNERS	A suite of short online videos, each of which shows a class using a specific protocol (simple routine). These protocols actively engage all learners. They are used throughout the K-2 module lessons to help students listen to and speak about the module content. The videos demonstrate that even very young learners can succeed with protocols when given enough scaffolding and practice.
WHY A STRUCTURED PHONICS PROGRAM IS EFFECTIVE, BY DAVID LIBEN	A clear and thorough explanation of the research behind a structured phonics approach to reading instruction, how this approach works, and why it is effective.
K-2 SKILLS BLOCK GRADE-LEVEL SCOPE AND SEQUENCE DOCUMENTS	The single-best source to understand the year’s work for each grade level of the K-2 Skills Block: an overview of the specific letters, spelling patterns, and skills taught in each module throughout a school year.
IMPLEMENTING THE K-2 READING FOUNDATIONS SKILLS BLOCK	A simple description of the purpose and structure of the K-2 Skills Block. Describes the structure of the modules and cycles, as well as what happens during whole group instruction and differentiated small group instruction. Provides introductory information about benchmark assessments, how to group students for differentiated small group instruction, and how to use independent student rotation activities.

General Resources

K-2 READING FOUNDATIONS SKILLS BLOCK RESOURCE MANUAL	<p>A suite of teacher resources critical for implementing the K-2 Skills Block, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance documents • Benchmark assessments (including administration and scoring guidance) • Activity bank • K-2 Skills Word List
VIDEOS: K-2 SKILLS BLOCK - READING FOUNDATIONS INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES	<p>An online video that shows a condensed version of the full hour of the Skills Block, including whole group instruction, transitions to differentiated small group instruction, and independent rotations. In addition, we have provided a suite of several short videos, each showing a teacher using a specific instructional practice (e.g., chaining) that forms the backbone of the “cycles” of lessons in the Grade 1 Skills Block. The videos illustrate design features of the entire K-2 Skills curriculum (e.g., the relationship between spelling and reading).</p>
GRADES 3-5 IMPLEMENTING THE ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE AND LITERACY (ALL) BLOCK	<p>A simple description of the purpose and structure of the Grades 3-5 ALL Block. Describes the five components and the two-week cycle. Describes rotations, how to group students, and the strand for English language learners. Answers frequently asked questions.</p>
GRADES 3-5 LIFE SCIENCE GRADE-LEVEL MODULE OVERVIEWS	<p>Because there is just one Life Science Module per grade level (eight weeks of instruction), no yearlong guidance documents exist. Each grade-level module overview includes background information to help general education teachers build their own background knowledge about the science content (before using the module with students).</p>