



Core Knowledge

**CORE KNOWLEDGE LANGUAGE ARTS®
GRADES 6-8 UNITS**

Core Knowledge Language Arts® is a comprehensive language arts program for students in Grade 6–8. While teaching skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking, Core Knowledge Language Arts® (CKLA) also builds students’ knowledge and vocabulary in literature, history, geography, and science by systematically addressing topics and concepts of interest to middle school students, as specified in the 2023 Core Knowledge Sequence.

The books that students read in CKLA® Grades 6 – 8 include contemporary novels and short stories by award-winning authors, classic tales, poetry, and drama, as well as nonfiction offerings.

Unit	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
1	<i>Flying Lessons & Other Stories</i>	<i>Hello Universe!</i>	<i>Us in Progress: Short Stories About Young Latinos</i>
2	<i>Calling All Minds: How to Think & Create Like an Inventor</i>	<i>The Tempest</i>	<i>Frankenstein</i>
3	<i>The Heritage of Ancient Greece & Rome</i>	<i>Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde</i>	<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave</i>
4	<i>The Iliad, the Odyssey, and Other Greek Stories</i>	<i>The Time Machine</i>	<i>The Genius of the Harlem Renaissance, Volume 2</i>
5	<i>The Tragedy of Julius Caesar</i>	<i>Realms of Gold, Volume 2</i> (poetry selections)	<i>A More Perfect Union: Voices for Civil Rights In America</i>
6	<i>Ninety Miles to Havana</i>	<i>The Genius of the Harlem Renaissance, Volume 1</i>	<i>The Squatter and The Don</i>
7	<i>Blessings of Liberty: Voices for Justice & Equal Rights In America</i>	<i>Anne Frank’s Tales from the Secret Annex</i>	<i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i>
8	<i>Realms of Gold, Volume 1</i> (poetry selections)	<i>Code Talker</i>	<i>Realms of Gold, Volume 3</i> (poetry selections)

Reading Lesson Types

Whole Group: For a whole group reading lesson, teachers provide reading instruction to the whole class. In general, you will introduce the selection(s), review what students have already learned (when applicable), preview vocabulary, and establish a purpose for reading. Then, you will guide students' reading by focusing on small chunks of text.

Using guided reading supports, you will briefly engage students in discussion as you also reference images, captions, and other text features throughout the lesson.

After reading, you will have the opportunity to check students' comprehension of the text using oral discussion questions, written activity page items, or some combination. Teachers should review completed activity pages, preferably with student involvement, to assess and monitor students' comprehension and to provide rapid clarification and feedback.

Small Group: For a small group reading lesson, you will divide the class into two groups.

Small Group 1 should include students who need extra scaffolding and support in order to read and comprehend the text. Teachers should provide instruction to this group using the same procedures as a whole group reading lesson. In addition, you will provide support as students complete an activity page, either during reading or afterward. There are many advantages to using this approach with a smaller number of students, including more frequent opportunities for each student to be actively engaged and to respond orally. This allows you to provide immediate corrective feedback and instruction for individual students.

Small Group 2 should include students who are capable of reading and comprehending the text without guided support. These students may work as a small group, as partners, or independently to read the story, discuss it with others in Small Group 2, and then complete an activity page.

After reading, you will call students together as a class to briefly discuss the selection and wrap up the lesson. Because students in Small Group 2 will complete the activity page independently, you should make arrangements to ensure they have completed it correctly. You might choose to collect the pages and correct them individually; provide an answer key for students to check their own or a partner's completed activity page; or confer with students individually or as a group at a later time.

Partner: For a partner reading lesson, you will pair students to read and discuss the selections. Teachers may wish to use any or all of the following pairings at different times:

- strong readers with readers who need more support
- readers of similar skill levels
- English language learners with native speakers

Note: Additional Teacher Guides and Student Activity Books with resources for use with English Language Learners are also available at each grade level – [Grade 6](#), [Grade 7](#), and [Grade 8](#).

You will explain that both students will read the first page of the selection silently, and then one partner will read that page aloud.

Next, they will both read the second page silently, and then the other partner will read that page aloud, and so on. Students can ask their partner for help to sound out or define words as necessary. You may wish to adjust this structure as students' needs change. You may also wish to provide guiding questions for students to periodically stop and discuss with their partners.

Students will complete an activity page with their partners either during or after reading. You will call students back together as a class after reading to discuss the story and the activity page.

Read-Aloud: Cognitive science suggests that even in middle school, students' listening comprehension still surpasses their independent reading comprehension (Sticht, 1984). For this reason, in *Core Knowledge Language Arts Grades 6 - 8*, reading aloud continues to be used as an instructional approach in these grades to ensure that students fully grasp the content presented in each selection. Students will typically be directed to read specific sections of text quietly to themselves, while other sections will be read aloud by the teacher or a student volunteer.

In a typical read-aloud lesson, you will introduce the selection, review what students have already learned, preview vocabulary, and establish a purpose for reading. Then, you or a student will read a portion of the selection aloud while all students follow along in the CKLA Reader or trade book. Teachers should use the guided reading supports to ask questions, discuss vocabulary, and/ or highlight important aspects of the text, as well as call students' attention to images, captions, and other text features.

After reading, you will have the opportunity to check students' comprehension of the text using oral discussion questions, written activity page items, or some combination. Teachers should review completed activity pages, preferably with student involvement, to assess and monitor students' comprehension and to provide rapid clarification and feedback.

Independent Reading: At least one or more reading lessons in each unit asks students to read independently. The ultimate goal for each student is to be capable of reading an entire passage independently with complete comprehension. Therefore, while it is important to scaffold instruction as previously described to ensure that students understand the content, it is also important to balance this approach by providing opportunities for students to practice reading longer and longer passages entirely on their own.

During each independent reading lesson, students will also be prompted to complete some type of note-taking activity to focus their attention on comprehension and understanding key details in the reading passage. Students may also be asked to respond by writing a response to a prompt to check for understanding and engage in class discussion as time allows.

It will be especially important for the teacher to review all students' written responses to any independent reading prior to the next day's lesson to ascertain whether all students are able to maintain comprehension when they read and engage with the text independently.

If one or more students struggle to maintain comprehension when asked to read an entire passage independently, we recommend that during the next opportunity, you pull these students into a small group. Then, while the remainder of the class works independently, you can work with the small group using the Guided Reading Supports that are included in the Teacher Guide for each lesson.

Close Reading: The CCSS and most state standards emphasize the practice of close reading, including asking text dependent questions worthy of students' time to answer. Explicit instructions for utilizing a close reading approach with particular selections from the CKLA reader or trade book are included in each unit. These lessons are carefully crafted to focus students' reading to derive deeper meaning through close examination of the text.

Comprehension Questions

The lessons for all CKLA units feature the following types of text-dependent comprehension questions:

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 are also text-dependent but require students to provide text evidence to 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 analyze, form an opinion, or make a judgment. These questions are often text-dependent, requiring students to paraphrase and/or refer back to the portion(s) of the text that substantiate the argument they are making or the opinion they are offering.

Evaluative questions might ask students to:

- Analyze the structure of a text, details in the text, or the author’s development of ideas.
- Determine the author’s or narrator’s point of view and support that reasoning with text evidence.
- Integrate information from different media formats to come to an understanding of a topic and/or compare the experience reading vs. viewing a text.
- Trace and evaluate the arguments or claims in a text.
- Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history.
- Analyze how two or more authors writing about the same topic shape their presentations of key information by emphasizing different evidence or advancing different interpretations of facts.

Vocabulary

A primary goal of the CKLA program is to expose students to rich domain-specific vocabulary and general academic vocabulary. The texts and associated instructional materials within each unit have been crafted to 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 unit spans several weeks of instruction, during which students read several unique chapters or selections. 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; implicit vocabulary learning is an efficient and effective way to build a broad, rich vocabulary base.

Whether vocabulary is introduced implicitly or explicitly, students have multiple opportunities to build their understanding of words and to generalize this understanding to new contexts,

expanding their receptive vocabulary. As students progress through the unit, they may begin to use new vocabulary words in their speech and writing, expanding their expressive vocabulary. The more you model the use of new vocabulary when discussing each chapter, the more likely students will be to try using these words as well.

The CCSS reference Beck, McKeown, and Kucan's (2002) three-tiered model for conceptualizing and categorizing vocabulary words. Tier 1 words, also called everyday speech words, typically do not pose a challenge for native speakers. As such, Tier 1 words are generally not the focus of explicit instruction for most students.

Tier 2 words, also called general academic 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.

Where applicable, we use general academic words throughout the unit, as they refer to all subjects—reading, writing, grammar, morphology, and spelling. They may appear in assessments, spelling lists, activity pages, and discussion questions, among other places. Specific academic (Tier 2) vocabulary has been targeted for intentional focus in each unit. These words are listed and defined in Lesson 1 of each unit. They are underlined in lessons whenever they are included. Teachers should define academic vocabulary words for students and use them daily throughout the school day so students may experience multiple exposures to them.

Tier 3 words, also called domain-specific words, relate to the content domain of study. Domain-specific words occur less frequently than Tier 1 and Tier 2 words outside of domain-specific text, but they are critical to understanding unfamiliar domain content. Understanding domain-specific vocabulary contributes to building domain knowledge, which is important for understanding domain-specific text and concepts.

Students in turn can use domain knowledge as background knowledge to build upon when encountering new texts on similar topics. Targeted core vocabulary appears in the Reader text and includes both academic (Tier 2) and domain-specific (Tier 3) words. These words appear in each lesson as a sequential list to be previewed before students read the corresponding section. Each word is presented with its part of speech, its meaning, and, when applicable, other forms of the word that appear in the selection.

In each lesson, there is a list of vocabulary words. When previewing vocabulary, particularly domain-specific vocabulary, it is important that you explain the word's meaning and how the word is used in context. Understanding both the meaning of the word and the way the word is

used in the selection context will help students build their vocabulary knowledge and help them recognize the word and its context in other texts.

Writing

In the writing lessons of each unit, students will review the stages of the writing process and engage in an extended writing project. In the earlier grades in CKLA, writing skills such as sentence and paragraph formation were taught in distinct lessons before being integrated into the unit writing project. While students will still draw on these skills, the CCSS and state standards have a greater focus on text structure, organization, sourcing, style, and craft in middle school. Thus, Grade 6 - 8 students engage in longer, more robust writing projects that incorporate these writing skills, as well as the unit's grammar, spelling, and morphology skills, to produce the kind of writing that they will need as they move through middle school and on to high school.

The CKLA writing process includes the following components: planning, drafting, sharing, evaluating, revising, and editing (and the optional component of publishing). In Grades 6-8, students move between components of the writing process in a flexible manner similar to the process mature and experienced writers follow naturally.

Writing lessons include multiple opportunities for peer collaboration and teacher scaffolding. Additionally, when students write, we encourage you to circulate around the room and engage in over-the-shoulder conferences to provide brief, targeted feedback.

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 will focus on the use of evidence from the text and individual sentence construction.

Grammar

Initial lessons teach grammar skills in isolation to ensure students understand and master them. Later lessons in each unit integrate grammar skills with writing to ensure students master the skills in a broader context. Students are expected to apply these grammar skills to the unit writing project and to other writing throughout Grades 6 - 8.

Morphology

Morphology is defined as the study of word parts and how the parts provide clues to the meaning of words. In Grades 6 - 8, students study word parts, such as prefixes, suffixes, and root words. The morphology skills are also applied and integrated into the unit spelling lessons.

Spelling

Spelling lessons and spelling assessments initially focus on morphological families. This is an important aspect of a language arts program, and students should be expected to perform well on spelling assessments. It is also important, however, to focus on spelling within the broader context of students' daily written work.

In Grades 6 - 8 spelling lessons, some words are also pulled from the reading selections to provide more meaningful instruction. Whether the words are selected from morphological families or the reading selections, teachers should encourage students to generate logical, defensible spellings based on code knowledge rather than guessing. If lack of code knowledge appears pervasive and affects a student's reading and spelling, it may be necessary to provide additional code instruction, using the *CKLA Assessment and Remediation Guide*.

Speaking and Listening

The CKLA program aligns to the standards and expectations of the CCSS-ELA for speaking and listening by providing numerous opportunities to engage in rich, structured, text-based conversations in a variety of settings and group sizes. For example, during read-aloud lessons, students engage with the text primarily by listening to others read and then integrate and evaluate that information in discussions with their classmates.

As another example, during writing lessons, students take turns presenting their writing to partners, small groups, or the whole class and follow those presentations with rich and constructive conversations about the writing.

Assessment

CKLA provides a variety of assessment tools, including formal and informal assessments, formative and summative assessments, and progress-monitoring assessments targeting specific skills:

- An optional Mid-Unit Comprehension Check and End-of-Unit Comprehension Check are provided to assess students' reading comprehension midway through each unit and at the end of each unit. These are formative tools that can be used to determine which students could benefit from extra reading supports or enrichment.
- A Unit Assessment is administered at the end of each unit to assess students' understanding of the reading, writing, spelling, grammar, and comprehension skills taught in the unit. The reading comprehension portion of the assessment is guided by the CCSS and guidelines provided by [Student Achievement Partners](#). It features text considered worthy of students' time to read and meets expectations for text complexity at Grades 6 - 8. The text also features core content and domain vocabulary from the unit that students can use to aid comprehension. Questions have been designed to require deep analysis of the text, rather than focusing on minor points.

Differentiation of Instruction

Opportunities for differentiation of instruction feature prominently in the CKLA program. There are multiple suggestions for how to support and challenge students throughout the lessons. These optional questions, activities, and information are labeled SUPPORT and CHALLENGE.

Teachers should use these SUPPORT and CHALLENGE opportunities to address the needs of their class and individual students.

Each unit also concludes with a Pausing Point for differentiation of instruction. The purpose of the Pausing Point is to provide opportunities for remediation and enrichment based on the results of the Unit Assessment. You may wish to provide remediation or enrichment opportunities to individual students, small groups, or the whole class, based on students' needs.