Civic Reasoning and Discourse Across The Curriculum

LITERACY

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of this report is to illustrate how the teaching of a broad range of literacy competencies can be leveraged across the curriculum as teachers prepare young people through schooling to engage thoughtfully in civic reasoning and discourse. This report provides exemplars that embody a commitment to democratic principles. The exemplars embody supports for the dimensions of civic reasoning outlined in the report *Educating for Civic Reasoning and Discourse* (Lee et al., 2021): knowledge (conceptual, procedural, and content-focused); epistemological orientations to value complexity; ethical dispositions to empathize with others, listen to others, and seek fairness; and complex reasoning requiring weighing multiple points of view and seeking evidence from reliable sources.

The exemplars will also illustrate pedagogical practices informed by our understanding of the science of human learning and development that create a sense of safety, self-efficacy, and relevance to maximize the likelihood that students can learn these dimensions of civic reasoning and discourse in an authentic way (Cantor et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2023; Nasir et al., 2020; Osher et al., 2020). We argue in these exemplars that engaging young people in civic reasoning and discourse expands their learning of rigorous literacy skills. Considering the decades of data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) that show a majority of students in public schools across the nation do not achieve proficiency in literacy, we emphasize that the strategies described in this report for supporting civic reasoning and discourse through literacy practices, with a special emphasis on interrogating texts, address the needs to improve reading instruction in our schools as well as expand our students' knowledge, willingness, and critical skills to interrogate our persistent and unique public challenges in the civic domain. Many of the sources of information on which we draw to discuss and debate issues in the public domain are text-based. Thus, both a willingness to interrogate texts and a capacity to engage critically with a wide range of texts are compelling tools for civic reasoning and discourse.

READING COMPREHENSION: KEY COMPONENT IN LITERACY LEARNING AND INSTRUCTION

Literacy skills, broadly speaking, include reading comprehension, understanding of language orally and in print, and composition in several genres, including narrative and argumentation. This report focuses largely on the comprehension of written texts.[1] We first articulate a basic overview of what is entailed in text comprehension and then offer more specific discussions of reading or text comprehension at different grade bands (elementary, middle, and high schools).

Text comprehension can be thought of as a form of ill-structured problem-solving (Hatano & Inagaki, 1986)—that is, problems for which no simple predetermined process for solving exists. The foundational skills of decoding and fluency that serve as requisite skills for reading texts have been well established in the research literature (Snow, 2002; Snow et al., 1998). Indeed, we have reliable and accessible assessments—diagnostic, formative, and summative—to identify what students know and are able to do with regard to these skills.

However, beyond these foundational skills, reading comprehension requires the reader to figure out early on and as they continue to read what problems or questions are being addressed—that is, what is the reader to understand as a consequence of reading a given text? At the same time, the reader brings goals to the act of reading the text. These goals may be personal or may be imposed by the context (i.e., what a given context expects the reader to do as a consequence of reading). In schooling, the goals for reading may be both personal and imposed by the teacher, curriculum, or assessment.

The overarching point here is that readers must determine the demands of the text and the demands of the task readers seek to carry out as a result of reading in order to figure out how to solve the problem they have set for themselves. And these understandings typically unfold as a constructive process as readers are reading, not simply set and established before they begin to read (Lee, 2023). Readers need to be metacognitive in monitoring their understanding as they are reading. That knowledge of texts includes ways in which texts are structured and language conventions that convey meaning. These language conventions include vocabulary; sentence structures; and broader grammar conventions such as noun–pronoun antecedents, synonyms, and antonyms, among others. Understanding reading comprehension as an outgrowth of dialogic relations between the reader, the text, and the task is critical to those who are designing supports to help young people to be able and be disposed to interrogate increasingly complex texts and tasks. Design of robust instruction to support reading comprehension must anticipate what the reader brings, what the text demands, and what the task requires so that instruction can embody all these components (Lee & Goldman, 2015; Valencia et al., 2014).

Students encounter different text genres that employ various rhetorical features and structures across disciplines. Depending on the discipline and the genres within that discipline, authors will typically employ rhetorical features and structures to signify to the reader the author's intention regarding logical relations among propositions. With expository texts (e.g., newspaper or magazine articles, textbooks), these rhetorical features may signify cause–effect, sequencing, problem–solution, and if–then relations, among others, or any combination thereof. With narrative texts (e.g., short stories, novels, plays, narrative poems), authors seek to draw our attention to understanding characters, their internal states, and their motivations and goals; understanding plot (the chronological and logical relations among actions taken on by characters or other forces at work); and deriving what is called a coda, theme, or "so what" from having read the narrative. Narrative texts are also told by one or more narrators whose point(s) of view and reliability should be taken into consideration. Other forms of poetry are not necessarily driven by characters, such as haiku and the sonnet. For most narrative texts—but sometimes also employed in expository texts—authors will create figurative ways of using

[1] The comprehension of other forms of representation—visual displays such as data displays, photographs, works of art, videos, and film—is discussed more extensively in other disciplinary reports (e.g., digital citizenship education, science, mathematics, history and social studies).

language to convey meaning, tone, or mood (e.g., metaphor, symbolism, alliteration, onomatopoeia) or rhetorical structures to convey authorial intent (e.g., irony, satire, unreliable narration). This report argues that understanding these tools of narration is not limited to students in upper cycle grades—young children are exposed to these narrative tropes (e.g., in the literature and narratives children view on television and social media), and while they do not have explicit language to explain how they know, they are capable of understanding them. In a similar vein, lest we think that detecting, understanding, and interrogating these narrative tropes are not accessible skills to older children and adolescents who are identified as struggling readers, we need only to examine song lyrics, popular films, and television series; communication on digital media such as X and Facebook; as well as everyday language registers (Lee, 1995) (e.g., use of signifying in African American English vernacular). We know that even struggling readers on a regular basis, without explicit instruction in or out of school, are perfectly capable of detecting, comprehending, and interrogating these narrative tropes.

CIVIC REASONING AND DISCOURSE ACROSS THE GRADES: SYNERGIES WITH LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Reading in the Primary Grades

Teaching children to decode and encode/spell words is, rightly, a major focus of U.S. primary-grade education (i.e., kindergarten through second or third grade); however, no evidence exists that it should be the *only* focus of education in these years (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Tierney & Pearson, 2024). Rather, research supports attention to many aspects of literacy in the primary grades. Fortunately, many aspects of literacy development can occur in part in the context of education designed to develop civic reasoning and discourse. In fact, there are valuable synergies between literacy development and civic development in young children.

A large body of research documents the value of teaching children to decode and encode words in the primary grades. This instruction must address children's understanding of what print is and how it works. In alphabetic languages, such as English, learning to decode and encode also involves teaching children to associate sounds within words with specific letters and groups of letters and vice versa. To make use of those sound–letter associations, we help children learn to blend sounds together to decode words (e.g., to read *cup*, to blend the *k, u,* and *p* sounds) and to segment or break apart the sounds within words in order to encode them. The goal is for children to develop the ability to read and write words not only accurately but automatically, so that the bulk of their attention may focus on the purpose, meaning, and use of text.

Teaching decoding and encoding is demanding and complex, but no evidence exists that it should encompass the entirety of the school day or even the entirety of the portion of the school day explicitly devoted to literacy. Although research has not established an optimal amount of time to devote to instruction focused on literacy foundational skills, expert recommendations rarely exceed an hour a day and are often less (Connor et al., 2004; Duke, 2000). This leaves considerable time for attention to other aspects of literacy development, including the ability to comprehend and compose text, as well as to other curricular areas, including civic reasoning and discourse.

Not only is there room in the day for many aspects of literacy development and for civic reasoning and discourse, but these areas can work synergistically in children's development. To take a simple example, consider the word "vote." Research suggests that learning to read and spell this word requires children to engage in orthographic mapping—to connect the sounds of the words, the letters that represent those sounds, and the meaning that that series of sounds and letters represents (Ehri, 2014). Phonics and spelling instruction helps children learn the pattern in which words in English ending with an o, a consonant, and then e, as "vote" does, are typically pronounced with a "long o" sound. Civic education can build the vocabulary and concept knowledge that enables children to know that this pronunciation results in a real word and to learn the meaning that maps onto this word. Morphology instruction—instruction in the smallest meaningful portions of words—will support children in learning to ascertain

the meaning of variations on "vote," such as "votes," "voter," and "revote" (Goodwin & Ahn, 2013). And civic education provides a context in which children encounter these words and apply their developing ability to determine their meanings.

The area of reading comprehension provides another compelling case of addressing literacy instructional goals as well as civic reasoning and discourse. For example, the teacher might read children two articles with different points of view regarding whether sugarcane farming should be allowed in the Everglades. With one text, the teacher might think aloud or model the process of identifying the primary claim the author is making and the reasons the author is giving to support that claim. With the second text, children might work in pairs to repeat this process, completing a graphic organizer together that offers a space to write the primary claim and reasons given. Each child might go on to use a blank version of that same graphic organizer in planning to write their own text on a land use issue that the class has been studying. This brief example includes many components of reading comprehension instruction that enjoy robust support in research (Duke et al., 2021) including

- building children's content knowledge,
- teaching children strategies for analyzing and understanding texts,
- engaging children in structured discussion of text,
- providing opportunities to use graphic organizers, and
- connecting comprehension/reading and composition/writing.

In the example, each of these practices is activated by a focus on civic education and discourse; instruction simultaneously addresses literacy and civic development.

Entire disciplinary units in the primary grades can address both literacy and civic development. For example, in one study, second-grade teachers taught units in each of four social studies disciplines: civics and government, history, economics, and geography (Duke et al., 2020). Units engaged children in projects to support their local community, such as to try to persuade their local city government to make improvements to a local park or other public space. Projects were designed to integrate reading, writing, speaking, and listening. For instance, children listened to a read aloud about local government, read city websites to identify who has responsibility over parks or other public spaces in their community, and learned techniques for persuasion that they incorporated into letters they wrote and a presentation they gave to/for a local city government official. Compared to classrooms randomly assigned to teach social studies as they normally would, children experiencing the integrated project-based units showed higher growth in social studies and also in informational reading. Instructional goals in both domains were achieved simultaneously.

In sum, our position is that primary-grade education can and should address decoding and spelling development in addition to many other contributors to literacy achievement. Civic education provides a context for developing knowledge, skills, and dispositions that support literacy development; in turn, literacy is entailed in civic learning and civic action. Literacy and civic education work synergistically.

Reading in Middle and High School

Middle and high school introduce specialized demands for text comprehension. There are expectations for increased reading in the content areas (Lee & Spratley, 2010). In social studies and history, students are expected to read not only textbooks but also primary and secondary sources. The Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) also call for students to read both textbooks and primary and

secondary sources. English language arts instruction focuses largely on narrative texts but also on informational texts. Because of this expanded range of texts and where the tasks of comprehension entail forms of reasoning that are specific to the disciplines, it is essential to define explicitly the scope of what students must know and be able to do with texts. This vast set of skills includes knowledge of specialized text structures, expansive vocabulary including academic language, and syntax.

Because the focus of this report is the literacy demands of civic reasoning and discourse, we seek to illustrate how students can be supported in examining complex and often contested topics using critical thinking resources available to them through a range of texts. In particular, students will engage in argumentation—through having discussions, composing written essays, and creating other artifacts that capture their thinking about such complex questions. In order to extrapolate and evaluate information from texts,

A

Handling Challenging Texts[a]

Texts—such as articles, videos, books, and historical documents—are crucial to civic education. Yet teachers face a significant challenge in that many students have difficulty reading grade-level texts. Here are some ways to make grade-level texts more accessible to students:

- **Work with sets of texts.** The more that students read on a topic, the more background knowledge and vocabulary they'll have to support them with the next text.
- **Use ramp-up texts.** Start students off with more accessible texts on the topic, such as easier-to-read written texts, videos, or audio recordings, to "ramp up" to reading more challenging texts.
- **Use texts with digital supports.** Some texts are available in digital platforms that provide supports such as difficult words that are read aloud if the student clicks on them and providing glosses for word meanings.
- **Chunk the text.** Provide the texts in chunks and provide a key question that each chunk addresses. Chunking texts make them less overwhelming for students and may encourage close reading.
- **Provide graphic organizers.** It can help students a great deal when they understand the structure of the text and information. Provide a blank graphic organizer and give students time in groups to complete it.
- **Support sentence-level comprehension.** In some cases, texts are difficult even at the level of the individual sentence. Engage students in unpacking with a given sentence means, for example, what each pronoun refers to, how the sentence clauses relate, and what linking words are telling us.
- **Provide opportunities to re-read the text.** We all get more out of reading a text multiple times. Key historical documents are especially worthy of repeated reading.
- **Use Questioning the Author or other supportive discussion approaches.** In Questioning the Author (e.g., Beck & McKeown, 2006), students learn that not all authors write as clearly as we would like. In groups, students engage with queries about the author, such as "What is the author trying to say here?".
- **Rewrite the text.** Depending on the difficulty of the text, you may need to rewrite portions of the text to be more accessible, or even engage students in doing so.
- **Have an authentic purpose for the reading.** Perhaps students are reading the text to prepare a presentation for younger students, to develop an informational exhibit for the local library, or to inform a letter they are writing to the state legislature. Having a purpose for reading supports motivation and comprehension development.

[a] Provided by Nell Duke.

students must be able to detect the sources of complexity in the texts they meet, infer meaning as a consequence of knowing how to address those sources of complexity, and monitor their understanding as they read with access to fix-up strategies when they do not understand.

There are generic strategies students should learn with informational texts, such as detecting indicators of text structures. Text structures capture the logical relations among propositions in a text. These include description, cause and effect, compare and contrast, problem and solution, and sequence. More complex and indeed more common are texts that include more than one text structure. In such texts, students must be able to monitor when shifts in the underlying organization of ideas occur. These processes of detecting text structures are also complex because sometimes the indicators of these relationships will include explicit language (e.g., use of "because" for cause–effect relationships; use of "if–then" for problem–solution; use of "then, after, before" for sequence), but sometimes the language is implicit.

There are also generic strategies for literary texts. Most literary texts are narratives for which examining characters, plot, and theme is foundational. Within specialized narrative genres, there are more detailed strategies for understanding characters, plot, theme, and point of view (Smagorinsky & Gevinson, 1989; Smith & Hillocks, 1988). It is also important to remember the literary forms that are not narratives, such as poetry genres of haiku and sonnets.

In addition to generic strategies, there are also language issues. Reading in the content areas almost always introduces Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary and ways of using language that embody core concepts and modes of reasoning (Snow, 2010; Uccelli et al., 2015). In some cases, one purpose of a given informational text will be to explain a given concept. At other times, the text will use content-specific vocabulary with the assumption that the reader already understands the concept. Language issues also entail such issues as antecedents. Such antecedents may include understanding what words as simple as "it," "they," or "both" are referring back to as well as understanding relational words such as "if" and "although."

Because reading comprehension unfolds internally in the mind of the reader, there are pedagogical challenges for teachers to understand how students are making sense as they are reading. It is common in both commercial curricula as well as pedagogy to ask students for outcomes of comprehension after they have read. If we only look at outcomes, it is challenging to understand what contributes to a lack of understanding (Lee, 2023). Sometimes this can be addressed by the nature of comprehension questions we pose. For example, Hillocks and Ludlow (1984) developed a taxonomy of questions for fiction. Each question represents a specialized skill and is sequenced in order of complexity. The broader pedagogical implication is for teachers to require students to create external representations of their understanding, such as annotations as well as use of graphic organizers. Such graphic organizers should be specialized to the demands of the text (e.g., character and plot maps for narratives). For informational texts, we recommend that students learn to select the appropriate graphic organizer for the text or sections of a text. Instead of the teacher telling the student by giving them the prescribed graphic organizer, this shows the teacher that the student can detect indicators of logical relations among propositions. The creation of external representations of students' thinking as they are reading provides an opportunity for students to make their thinking visible, for the teacher to examine students' meaning-making processes, and for students to explore how others have tackled the

problems of the text. With regard to wrestling with complex topics in the civic domain, students may take very different positions with regard to propositions in text sets; therefore, having external representations of their thinking can support interrogating different points of view.

Background knowledge is an important contributor to comprehension, for both informational and narrative texts. Teachers must decide what background knowledge a given text presumes a reader brings to a text, when to build background knowledge for a given text or text set, and when it is reasonable that students will be able to build content knowledge without such preparation. Because our focus is on interrogating complex topics and questions in the civic domain, building content knowledge is very important.

Reading in the Disciplines in Middle and High School

History and Social Studies

Reading in both social studies and history in these grades should include more than textbooks. Students should read primary and secondary texts. Primary texts are documents produced in the historical moment, typically by actors engaged in the events of the period. Secondary texts are often responses to, or interpretations of, events or ideas articulated by others, which are not created by actors directly involved in events, activity, or production of ideas.

History is the study of events of the past, their chronologies, their causes, and their consequences. Historical reasoning asks students to examine sources of information about events in the past (Wineburg, 2002). With our focus on literacy, these sources of information can include the following: political documents, legal documents, newspaper and magazine/journal articles, letters, and diaries, as well as visual genres such as photographs, political cartoons, artwork, and digital media. Students are asked to interrogate the credibility of documents, especially primary source documents, through sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration (Monte-Sano, 2011; Monte-Sano & Reisman, 2016; Reisman, 2012; Wineburg, 1991). These investigations include questioning the point of view of the author, if any vested interests are involved in the production of the document, the circumstances under which the document was produced, and the extent to which evidence presented in the document is supported or corroborated by other historical documentation. It is also important to note that texts in this area can include historical fiction. Historical fiction can invite interesting investigations as to how accurately a given work represents the historical moment of the plot and how authors may critique norms of the past. Moreover, historical fiction can invite students to experience the past in ways that expository texts cannot. Historical reasoning is only partially about the facts of what happened and equally about analyzing the meaning of what happened.

Social studies draws from multiple content areas—history, civics, economics, political science, anthropology, psychology, sociology, and studies of culture, among others. Its purpose is to enable students to examine how societies operate and how people engage with one another in societies and across societies. Social studies as a field encompasses history but has as one of its core anchors preparation for civic engagement: the ability and disposition to wrestle with what is required to hold the social contract together. According to the National Council for the Social Studies (n.d.), "The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world." In one sense, ethics is a central foundation of reasoning in social studies. There are several important issues with regard to child and adolescent development that are key considerations in teaching social studies across the K–12 sector. We know, for example, that even young children in the primary grades are both able and disposed to weigh issues of fairness, largely in terms of personal relationships they have with others and that they observe in the behavior of others, especially their peers (Nucci, 2014; Turiel, 2022).[2] Yet, it is not until later, for example in middle school, that they begin to understand

[2] In Appendix D, we offer a unit developed by Nell Duke and colleagues that illustrates what a social studies unit for second graders looks like.

norms of behavior as connected to societal norms and systems (Carpendale et al., 2013; Nucci, 2025). The ability to conceptualize societal norms and systems influences the kinds of questions children can tackle, particularly as these questions in middle and high school are connected to systems of governance and economic systems, which are also connected to the influences of geography. Figure 1 below from the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards (see Swan et al., 2013) illustrates how the breadth and depth of compelling questions in the study of social studies are responsive to the developmental trajectories of children and adolescents.

Thus instruction in social studies and history invites argumentation that is particularly relevant for civic reasoning and discourse (Reisman et al., 2020; Wineburg & Reisman, 2015). Lee and Nasir (2025) offer guidance regarding the developmental demands of engaging students across the K–12 sector in the combined work of developing moral well-being, civic reasoning and discourse, and discipline-specific reasoning and literacy skills. Nucci (2025) provides a comprehensive overview of supporting moral well-being and civic reasoning in terms of classroom norms and practices.

Science

Reading in science, across all grades but especially in middle and high school, is now expected through the NGSS (National Research Council, 2012). This includes reading primary and secondary source documents beyond the traditional textbooks. Students are expected across the grades to examine crosscutting concepts and disciplinary core ideas in the physical sciences, life sciences, and Earth and space sciences, as well as engineering, technology, and applications of science. The focus is on students experiencing the practices of scientists in order to develop deep conceptual understanding of big ideas. These scientific and engineering practices are identified as follows in the NGSS:

- asking questions (for science) and defining problems (for engineering)
- developing and using models
- planning and carrying out investigations
- analyzing and interpreting data
- using mathematics and computational thinking
- constructing explanations (for science) and designing solutions (for engineering)

Figure 1: **Suggested K–12 Pathway for College, Career, and Civic Readiness, Dimension 1, Constructing Compelling Questions**

BY THE END OF GRADE 2*	BY THE END OF GRADE 5*	BY THE END OF GRADE 8	BY THE END OF GRADE 12
INDIVIDUALLY AND WITH OTHERS, STUDENTS CONSTRUCT COMPELLING QUESTIONS, AND ...			
D1.1.K-2. Explain why the compelling question is important to the student.	D1.1.3-5. Explain why compelling questions are important to others (e.g., peers, adults).	D1.1.6-8. Explain how a question represents key ideas in the field.	D1.1.9-12. Explain how a question reflects an enduring issue in the field.
D1.2.K-2. Identity disciplinary ideas associated with a compelling question.	D1.2.3-5. Identify disciplinary concepts and ideas assocaited with a compelling question that are open to different interpretations.	D1.2.6-8. Explain points of agreement experts have about interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a compelling question.	D1.2.9-12. Explain points of agreement and disagreement experts have about interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a compelling question

* Students particularly before middle school, will need considerable guidance and support from adults to construct questions that are suitable for inquiry.

Note. Adapted from Swan et al. (2013).

- engaging in argument from evidence
- obtaining, evaluating, and communicating information

There are clear literacy practices entailed in these scientific and engineering practices: the presentation of models and of an array of types of data (e.g., mathematical displays, other representations of concepts and relationships through visuals) as well as access to scientific explanations through texts.

The NGSS is also clear that students should learn to engage the social and societal functions of science:

> We anticipate that the insights gained and interests provoked from studying and engaging in the practices of science and engineering during their K–12 schooling should help students see how science and engineering are instrumental in addressing major challenges that confront society today, such as generating sufficient energy, preventing and treating diseases, maintaining supplies of clean water and food, and solving the problems of global environmental change. (National Research Council, 2012, p. 9)

Across genres, texts in science can pose particular comprehension challenges (Lee & Spratley, 2010). For example, many texts include specialized vocabulary that often involves Greek and Latin roots. This means that science classrooms are generative spaces for vocabulary development, not only around Greek and Latin roots but also around skills related to prefixes and suffixes and how these provide windows into the functions of language expressing conceptual ideas. Another interesting vocabulary challenge in text comprehension in science is the use of everyday words that hold special scientific meanings (e.g., fruit, fat, dark matter) and language that conveys constructs of taxonomic categories. For example, you cannot pick up "mammal" as a taxonomic category, but it is a construct with functional attributes that can be inferred to apply to a wide range of animals, including humans. In other words, a mammal is a concept, not an animal.

Scientific texts, such as scientific research reports, often include abstracts, section headings, mathematical displays, diagrams, drawings, photographs, and maps to convey meanings. Each of these forms of representation include what we can think of as textural features that signify functions in communicating scientific arguments. Scientific texts also will often include syntactical forms that signify important relationships among ideas. These include use of embedded clauses (e.g., "an invisible gas called water vapor") and nominal apposition (e.g., "animals that eat plants, herbivores, may be found …").

Students can read a variety of texts beyond textbooks to access scientific arguments (Goldman & Bisanz, 2002; Goldman et al., 2003; Greenleaf et al., 2013). These include articles in journals aimed at a popular audience (e.g., Scientific American), reports on reliable websites, reference books, special reports in newspapers, books on scientific topics written for a popular audience, and research reports.

As with social studies, it is important to note that science learning also can include reading fictional texts. For example, science fiction can invite imagination about how present-day science and technologies will lead to different futures. Fiction can encourage students to empathize with others and to experience the real (or imagined) impact of science.

For an array of problems in the civic domain, knowledge in the domain of the sciences plays an important role in the public decision-making process (e.g., climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic). Students can be supported in weighing in on these consequential issues informed by credible understanding of concepts in the domains of science and weighed using credible scientific reasoning. While these topics include considerations of factors in the political domain, it is equally important that credible scientific reasoning is central to reasoning about how to address these dilemmas in the civic domain.

Literature

As we consider the challenges of reasoning about complex issues in the public domain, literature is

often not considered as a consequential tool. This is further complicated by current debates around book banning because of fears that certain topics will be divisive or developmentally inappropriate (Burmester & Howard, 2022; Kim, 2022; Knox, 2015).

We take a very different position on these dilemmas. Specifically, we argue that literature—through both reading and writing—offers a unique opportunity for readers to enter social and cultural words that are different from their life experiences (Hynds, 1989; Smagorinsky & Phelan, 1990). For much of the U.S., we live in largely segregated communities—by race/ethnicity and class—our abilities to emphasize with others who we perceive as different from ourselves, now and in the historic past, are constrained. Narrative is a powerful tool for sensemaking, in large part because we are biologically disposed from our evolution as a species to encode experiences in the world through narrative structures (Bruner, 1990). We encode many of our experiences in the world in terms of what we attribute to the internal states of actors. This social cognition (Flavell & Miller, 1998) is an essential skill that we develop from infancy on to try to understand the internal states of other actors. Narrative genres—oral, written, and visual—are represented in all cultures across historical time.

Literature, especially that which is sustained across time and space, typically embodies deep insights into the conundrums of the human experience. Great writers—of children's literature, young adult fiction, as well as classic texts from across cultural traditions—often wrestle with complex conundrums of the human experience that are not understood by simplistic explanations. Narratives are taken up in popular experiences through texts, digital media, music lyrics, and television and films, even for young children. Research has documented that young children have fundamental schemas for interpreting narratives (Trabasso & Sperry, 1985): inferring the internal states of characters and their motivations; understanding the chronological and logical relations among events in which characters are involved; and inferring a takeaway, coda, or theme from the experiences of characters in narratives. The fact that the capacity for understanding narratives, across an array of genres, is so ubiquitous across communities opens up powerful opportunities for interrogating conundrums of the human experience across the life course. It means that teachers have powerful resources for scaffolding what all students bring as comprehension resources for interrogating literary narratives.

We have argued that no conflict exists between teaching academic skills and engaging young people in civic reasoning and discourse. In this report, we seek to illustrate how literacy skills can be developed robustly as students wrestle with complex issues in the civic domain. This requires that we are explicit in identifying the technical skills needed for comprehension—including that which is generic and that which is discipline-specific—of the texts and other artifacts we ask students to interrogate.

Literary analysis entails the generic skills of identifying main ideas and supporting details, making inferences, and making and testing predictions as one is reading. However, how the reader goes about using these generic skills requires knowledge of particular features of literary texts that signal potential meanings. The underlying structure of following characters, plot, and theme as targets of the reader's attention becomes more complex in middle and high school. Students must learn to recognize character types and plot configurations, following point of view and the range of rhetorical and structural tools that authors employ to convey meaning beyond the literal. Box B illustrates this range of configurations.

Attention to these features of literary texts is also important for assessing text complexity. Traditionally, teachers are encouraged to use Lexile measures to determine how difficult a text may be for students. Lexile measures (White & Clement, 2001) largely look at vocabulary and sentence length. However, a story might have simple language, short sentences, and short length, and yet it is still deeply complex. Alice Walker's (1973) story "The Flowers" is a prime example. It can be read easily by a fifth grader,

B

Specialized Text Features in Literary Texts and Examples

Character types	Mythic hero, tragic hero, trickster
Plot configurations	Fables, science fiction, detective story, magical realism
Archetypal themes	Good, evil, justice, truth, war and peace, love
Problems of point of view	Reliable versus unreliable narrators, omniscient narrator, multiple narrators
Reliable versus unreliable narrators, omniscient narrator, multiple narrators	Symbolism, irony, metaphor, satire

but the themes explored, the subtle shifts in structure, and the images that are symbolic are complex and may be developmentally challenging for a fifth grader reading at or above grade level. The theme of the story explores the psychological impact of the ubiquitous practice of lynching during the Jim Crow era and as such invites readers to think critically about what lynching meant for the development of African American children, as well as invites the kind of ethical reasoning that must be brought to bear in examining discriminatory practices in our history and currently. Teachers have few resources for assessing these additional sources of text complexity in literary texts as well as other disciplines.

It is interesting to note that the place to identify the heuristics for detecting these sources of literary text complexity is in the work of university English departments—the field of literary theory and criticism. While literary theorists and critics employ these strategies (Booth, 1983; Rabinowitz, 1987), they are both still easily accessible to middle and high school students and in fact are intuitively understood by the general public. If we examine popular narrative genres such as music lyrics, movies and television shows, cartoons, and even television ads, they all embody these strategies. We identify movies we want to see because we anticipate character types and plot configurations. For example, we do not anticipate tragic action or violence in a romantic comedy. Satire is often used in innovative television commercials, and the general public does not confuse this satire as literal. So, our students come to school already empowered with intuitive understandings of these configurations of literary texts. Our task is to design instruction in ways that recruit these repertoires of knowledge, dispositions, and ways of using language (Lee, 2001, 2005; Lee et al., 2003). Such pedagogical practices are embodied in the Cultural Modeling Framework developed by Carol Lee (2014).

We emphasize the development of these technical competencies for interrogating literature because literature opens up the opportunities for civic reasoning and discourse such as developing the disposition to read literature widely across the life course and the disposition to examine such texts critically for personal meaning-making (Lee, Goldman, et al., 2016).

Argumentation—Oral and Written

Argumentation—the advancement of a point of view—is an essential form of engagement in human life. There has always been disagreement among humans, on matters great and small. Argument and persuasion were formalized among ancient rhetoricians as among the essen-

tial modes of expression for all citizens to practice responsibly. Argumentation has thus been among the writing genres built into the English curriculum and undertaken in other disciplines in which persuasion to a point of view is practiced.

Typically, argumentation is taught according to a logic formalized by Stephen Toulmin (Toulmin et al., 1984). His influence is evident in the Common Core State Standards, which state that students should learn how to "write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Proficiency in writing arguments is important to school success and on state assessments, where the rubrics include most of the elements identified by Toulmin. Although argumentation may be embedded in a variety of writing types—extended definitions, comparison–contrast papers that involve a judgment, reports that take a perspective, and many others—these writing types tend to rely on marshaling evidence in support of claims.

The Toulmin model for argumentation includes the following traits:

- an overarching thesis that guides the major thrust of the argument;
- a set of points, or claims, that provides a set of generalizations in support of the thesis;
- for each claim, the provision of "data" or examples that support the claim;
- a "warrant" that explains how the examples serve as evidence for the claims, and that distinguishes the claim from other seemingly identical perspectives that fall short of being supported by evidence;
- the anticipation of a counterargument, which is addressed through a rebuttal; and
- a concluding judgment that reviews the evidence and asserts the major points as having been substantiated.

Toulmin's claim-data-warrant-rebuttal model has provided the basis for major studies of the teaching of argument in schools (Hillocks, 2011; Newell et al., 2011). It has also provided the model for school instruction in argumentation. Simply teaching argumentation, however, has not always produced sound, persuasive arguments. The imitation of model essays has fared poorly in comparative research (Hillocks, 1986), and instruction in logic has not supported students in generating their own written arguments (Karbach, 1987; Kneupper, 1978). It seems that learning the rules of logic and the form of argumentation is insufficient, similar to the ways in which studying grammar has had little effect on students' usage (Graham & Perin, 2007; Hillocks, 1986; Weaver, 1996).

These problems are compounded when arguments have deeply emotional origins. Haidt (2012) has found that people on opposing sides of a political dispute often believe that they are logical, and their opponents are soft-minded. Haidt argues that how people think is how they feel, and that their arguments serve to justify their emotions after the fact. Even when working from logic, conflicting positions reflect different premises, draw on different evidence, and promote different outcomes. While Supreme Court justices are presumably the most judicious among us, they also produce split decisions in which their logics are unpersuasive to one another. If the most perspicacious minds in the land can only talk past each other without engaging, then the task of teaching responsible argumentation in school is challenging.

How, then, can a civic education most fruitfully help students produce arguments that enable them to make their points in the face of opposition and to engage with opposing viewpoints? School appears to be uniquely positioned as a developmental setting for learning how to engage in discourse and argue persuasively, especially with those with whom they disagree, and to recognize rhetorical moves in the public domain. It is especially important to recognize when these rhetorical moves spread misinformation through lies, distortions, emotional inflammation, belittling of opponents, issuing threats, and other illogical means.

The world of persuasion that students see in the media and in political theater has little grounding in the logic that students are taught to follow in school, which is designed to help students think like scientists, lawyers, detectives, and other truth-seekers. School is one place where they may learn a form of argumentation that has a sound basis. It is also a rare place where a teacher may organize instruction to promote listening to and engaging with other points of view as students inquire into the meaning and conduct of civic life.[3]

[3] See Appendix C for pedagogical strategies for teaching argumentation.

PRINCIPLES FOR DESIGNING INSTRUCTIONAL UNITS

We are providing exemplars of instructional units that illustrate attention to this breadth of competencies (e.g., reading comprehension, language, multiple dimensions of civic reasoning) that support learning to engage in civic reasoning and discourse. We offer these broad design principles to articulate the thinking behind these units, in the hopes that teachers can take up these principles in designing their own instructional units to support civic reasoning and discourse in literacy instruction across content areas, including all classes where students are expected to read, write, and learn language to engage with texts, ideas, and argumentation. These design principles are unique in that they include but go beyond content knowledge and isolated cognitive processes.

The instructional units are provided as illustrations that aim to support literacy skills while simultaneously supporting the multiple dimensions of civic reasoning we have identified. The design of these units also embodies the practices taken from what we know of the Science of Learning and Development (SoLD) (Cantor et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2023; Nasir et al., 2020) that create conditions to maximize engagement with complexity, to wrestle with challenge, and to question one's assumptions and to persist in such learning. These conditions informed by SoLD foster students' sense of self-efficacy, safety, and relevance, as well as positive social relationships.

The generic literacy skills include comprehending main ideas and key details as well as making inferences. Discipline-specific literacy skills include the following for these select areas of learning:

Literature	• Following plot, inferring internal states of characters, and extrapolating themes • Detecting problems of figuration (e.g., symbolism, irony, satire) and problems of narration (e.g., inferring point of view and reliability of narrators)
History and Social Studies	• Analyzing text genres (e.g., political documents, legal documents, newspaper and magazine/journal articles, letters, and diaries) as well as visual genres (e.g., photographs, political cartoons, artwork, maps, data displays, and digital media) • Examining primary (created during the historical moment), secondary (created after the historical moment as reflection and commentary on the past), and tertiary (written to summarize or synthesize information regarding historical acts and periods, such as textbooks) documents for reliability, contextualization, and corroboration with other sources in the historical record
Science	• Analyzing text genres (e.g., textbooks, journal articles, integrative syntheses such as handbook chapters, books written for popular audiences, diagrams, and print and digital articles) as well as visual genres (e.g., data displays) • Interpreting data • Evaluating the quality of scientific arguments and evidence

Because of the scope addressed in the exemplars, we have used the following tables to identify the components of the units. We cluster the tables in groups to draw attention to the related goals of the unit.

TABLE 1 **Overview of the Unit**

- Topic and essential questions
- Text set and rationale
- Pedagogical strategies

TABLE 2 **Literacy Demands of the Unit**

- Texts and sources of complexity
- Literacy tasks (what students will produce)
- Building on prior knowledge
- Pedagogical strategies for tackling the range and kinds of texts in the unit

TABLE 3 **Unit as Argumentation**

- Category of argumentation (e.g., fact, judgment, policy)
- Possible contested positions

TABLE 4 **How unit addresses dimensions of civic reasoning**

- Dispositions (e.g., questioning, weighing competing evidence, examining multiple points of view, listening to others, perspective-taking)
- Epistemolog (e.g., valuing complexity)
- Ethics (e.g., empathy)

TABLE 5 **How unit addresses developmental needs**

- Safety
- Self-efficacy
- Relevance

Logic of Unit Design

We sought to identify topics that engage students in information gathering through reading and examining a variety of texts in order to construct evidence-based arguments articulating positions they have taken. We have tried to identify topics that are meaningful, relevant to students' lived experiences, and contested and complex in the current public sphere, as well as topics that embody persistent challenges we have faced as a country in the civic domain. Additionally, we sought to identify topics for which there is not a singular, simple right or wrong answer, thus capturing the complexity that is almost always at play in our civic life. We have consciously attempted to identify potential competing points of view on the question(s) at hand and to identify an array of texts that allow students to explore competing ideas.

The exemplars take into consideration the differences in the developmental demands of civic reasoning and discourse from primary grades to middle grades to high school. Thus, we offer one suite of exemplars with units on a related theme for each of these grade clusters.

Because our focus is literacy, a foundational starting point should be to examine the sources of text complexity in the documents identified for the unit. Sources of text complexity go beyond traditional analyses of Lexile levels. It is entirely possible to have a text with a relatively low Lexile level that still poses complex problems of comprehension (see e.g., the short story "The Flowers" by Alice Walker). Even when we identify a text with a high readability or Lexile level, as teachers we need to identify the specific sources of complexity. For example, the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence has a Flesch-Kincaid grade level of 18.2, which is considered advanced and high school to college level. It is important to know that this paragraph, and indeed the full Declaration, is complex. However, that in itself is not sufficient to prepare students to tackle the text. That paragraph in its entirety of 271 words contains only five sentences. The first sentence of that paragraph is 111 words. Thus, sources of text complexity

include the ability to deconstruct compound and compound-complex sentences, to follow anaphora (not only noun–pronoun references but also when the same idea is communicated using different language across the text), and to understand vocabulary that is both archaic and deeply conceptual. Therefore, as a resource we include in Appendix B tables that identify sources of text complexity. Because of the breadth of what these exemplary units seek to accomplish, we highly recommend that schools organize collaborative instructional design communities of teachers who can work together to examine, in particular, sources of text complexity as a prerequisite for asking students to tackle difficult texts. By identifying such sources of text complexity and designing units to prepare students to identify and tackle these comprehension problems, we enhance the likelihood that even those often identified as struggling readers can indeed wrestle with texts that are complex. These efforts support one of the key propositions from SoLD, namely that when students feel efficacious and confident in their ability to tackle problems, they are more likely to be engaged and to persist. With regard to reading texts, too often we ask students for outcomes of comprehension without preparing them to understand their meaning-making processes in order to comprehend (Lee, 2023). Annotations and efforts to socialize students into being metacognitive are important and necessary but not sufficient. Just because students recognize that they don't understand doesn't mean they have any idea of what to do to fix the problem.

In most cases in this work, we will be asking students to make judgments. They will be provided texts with a variety of data. However, the challenge then is to figure out for what such data provide evidence. The logic of design here has to do with providing experiences in which students can develop criteria for recognizing a point of inquiry: a theme in a work of literature, a character type in a work of literature, a construct in the study of history (e.g., a kind of political system or economic system), or a construct in the study of science (e.g., climate change). Working to establish criteria upon which to evaluate evidence is a central component of teaching students argumentation and skills of civic reasoning and discourse.

EXEMPLARY UNITS

This report provides select exemplars across multiple topics to illustrate civic learning through literacy and how well-designed curriculum units address the demands of civic reasoning and discourse. The exemplar units include topics related to science, history and social studies, literature, as well as local school policies. The units are also organized into grade level bands.

Topic Area	Lesson Topic	Grade Band
Science	Deforestation	3-5
	(Re)imagining Our Climate Future	6-8
Social Studies	Gender Identity	K-3
	A Closer Look at Voting Rights (USA)	6-8
	Confederate Monument Debates	6-8
School Policy	Dress Codes	6-12

Each unit requires students to examine texts—written, visual, and digital—carefully and critically as resources for wrestling with complex questions in the public domain. The questions are not about simple right and wrong answers. At the same time, where relevant, the units also support students in gathering accurate information—for example, around deforestation and climate change. For such topics, in order to wrestle with the complexity of impacting these challenges, civic agents should center their reasoning in factual data. Many of the units also support students in considering how different communities experience the phenomenon of interest as well as different belief systems that diverse communities bring to the phenomenon of interest.

Deforestation (Grades 3–5)

Unit crafted by Rebecca Woodard

Table 1-1 Overview of Unit

Introduction	This inquiry is intended to support children to consider the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to deforestation. They will also examine different perspectives about deforestation. Ultimately, they will write opinion pieces about deforestation in which they support a point of view with reasons and information.
Topic	Deforestation
Essential questions	• Why do trees matter? • What are the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to deforestation? • What are different points of view about deforestation?
Text set and rationale	The primary text is a picture book called *The Wisdom of Trees*, which intersperses nonfiction prose and poetry to teach readers about trees (e.g., topics include how trees work as a wood wide web, communicate, ask for help, and defend themselves; how they filter air and lessen the impact of global warming; how older trees act as "mothers" to young "daughter" trees that grow from their seeds and nuts; and the importance of tree biodiversity for healthy forests). Sections of this text should be read aloud by the teacher at the beginning of the unit to explore why trees matter. There are three additional text sets about (1) the causes and consequences of deforestation, (2) different perspectives about deforestation, and (3) possible solutions to deforestation. These text sets include picture books, short informational articles, and websites. These text sets can be read with the teacher's support or in small groups. **Focal Texts:** • **Primary Read Aloud Picture Book:** *The Wisdom of Trees: How Trees Work Together to Form a Natural Kingdom* by Lita Judge • **Text Set 1:** Causes and Consequences of Deforestation. The function of this text set is to learn information about the causes and consequences of deforestation. ◦ **Article:** "Agribusiness and Deforestation" (Greenpeace) ◦ **Article:** "Habitat Destruction" (National Geographic Kids) ◦ **Article:** "Fire Alarm" (Time for Kids) ◦ **Picture Book:** *A Forest* by Marc Martin ◦ **Picture Book:** *Wake up, Sloth!* by Anouck Boisrobert and Louis Rigaud ◦ **Website:** Forest Facts for Kids (One Tree Planted) • **Text Set 2:** Different Perspectives About Deforestation. The function of this text set is to examine multiple points of view and engage in perspective-taking. Students will consider the varied perspectives of loggers, farmers, industry, and children living in impacted areas. This will help them to consider the different self-interests that impact the arguments being made about deforestation. ◦ **Article:** "Community at Loggerheads Over a Book by Dr. Seuss"—This article showcased how loggers' livelihoods are tied to logging practices. ◦ **Article:** "Farmers Mainly to Blame for Deforestation in the Amazon

- **Article:** "Hundreds of Companies Promised to Help Save the Forests. Did They?" (The New York Times)
- **Picture Book:** *Zonia's Rain Forest*

- **Text Set 3:** Possible Solutions to Deforestation. The function of this text set is to weigh competing evidence and question/debate which solutions are most promising.
  - **Article:** "Tech for Trees" (Time for Kids)
  - **Article:** "Planting Seeds" (Time for Kids)
  - **Article:** "Hope for the Wild" (Time for Kids)
  - **Article:** "What Is the Forest Act? Everything to Know About the US Bill to Fight Deforestation" (Global Citizen)
  - **Article:** "Why Small Farmers Are Crucial in the Fight Against Deforestation" (Livelihoods)
  - **Picture Book:** *The Boy Who Grew a Forest: The True Story of Jadav Payeng* written by Sophia Gholz and illustrated by Kayla Harren
  - **Picture Book:** *Wangari Maathai: The Woman Who Planted Millions of Trees* by Franck Prevot and Aurélia Fronty
  - **Website:** 10 Easy Ways Kids Can Help Save Rainforests (Rainforest Alliance)

Supplemental Texts:

- **Picture Book:** *The Leaf Detective: How Margaret Lowman Uncovered Secrets in the Rainforest* written by Heather Lang and illustrated by Jana Christy
- **Picture Book:** *Can You Hear the Trees Talking? Discovering the Hidden Life of the Forest* written by Peter Wohlleben
- **Picture Book:** *The Magic and Mystery of Trees* written by Jen Green and illustrated by Claire McElfatrick
- **Picture Book:** *Tree Full of Wonder* written by Anna Smithers and illustrated by Martyna Nejman
- **Picture Book:** *The Tree Lady: The True Story of How One Tree-Loving Woman Changed a City Forever* written by H. Joseph Hopkins and illustrated by Jill McElmurry

Pedagogical strategies

This exploration encourages children to engage with literature and informational texts as they craft opinions that are supported with reasons and information. As students analyze informational texts, they discuss their understandings of the importance of trees; the causes, consequences, and possible solutions for deforestation; and different perspectives about deforestation in small and large group settings. They engage one another's ideas by listening and respecting classmates' perspectives. They critically analyze the sources and varying perspectives, considering the authors' varied self-interest and viewpoints. As they read poems and stories, they empathize with both human and nonhuman perspectives (e.g., the character Zonia and her Asháninka community; the trees themselves, as children learn how they work together as a wood wide web). Ultimately, children write their own opinion pieces to a public audience (e.g., industry leaders) about deforestation, supporting them with reasons and information.

Table 1-2 Literacy Demands of the Unit

Texts and sources of complexity	The sources of text complexity for the various texts include the following:
	• For the *picture books*
	  ◦ The Wisdom of Trees: How Trees Work Together to Form a Natural Kingdom by Lita Judge uses a nontraditional format that intersperses information with poetry. The informational parts include specialized language and ideas.
	  ◦ The book Zonia's Rain Forest is a fictional text that tells the story of an Asháninka girl who lives in the rain forest and loves to explore its many wonders. Zonia discovers that a patch of the forest has become victim to deforestation. It frightens her, but she knows she must find a way to protect her home. Although this text is fictional, it is focused on real issues/topics—this is important to discuss with children.
	• For the *informational articles*
	  ◦ Most of the articles are short and written for children. However, they do have complex vocabulary and ideas. Children will need to discern the main and supporting ideas in different texts. They may also need to consider how the authors' self-interests inform their different perspectives and ideas.
	• For the *websites*
	  ◦ Both of the websites include numbered lists and have embedded hyperlinks that children will need to navigate.

Literacy tasks (what students will produce)	Children write their own opinion pieces to a public audience (e.g., industry leaders that do business in or have pulled out of business in the rainforest) about deforestation, supporting them with reasons and information. They share these pieces with these audiences/companies.
Building prior knowledge	There are numerous ways to build prior knowledge about what children know about trees. The poems in *The Wisdom of Trees: How Trees Work Together to Form a Natural Kingdom* offer one great entry point. Reading strategies can include the teacher reading aloud the poem, choral reading, and even acting out the poems. For example, acting out the poem "How to Speak in Tree" will help children to consider the ways trees and fungi partner together, and how trees communicate.
Pedagogical strategies for tackling the range and kinds of texts in the unit	Practices for addressing sources of complexity in these texts can include the following: • For the *picture books*, teachers can lead read alouds in which they orient children to the different sub-genres (e.g., poetry, information, story). • For the *informational articles*, students can identify complex vocabulary and complete graphic organizers that orient them to attend to the potential causes of and solutions for deforestation. • For the websites, children can discuss and organize the numbered lists (e.g., making judgments about the most interesting facts and telling their classmates why). They can be given exploratory time to navigate the hyperlinks.

Table 1-3 Unit as Argumentation

Category of argumentation	**Arguments of judgment**—Children make judgments about the kinds of topics related to trees/deforestation that are most meaningful to them. They write opinion pieces about different aspects of deforestation (e.g., why it matters, its impact, and/or potential solutions) and support their point of view with reasons and information.
Possible contested positions	Children will grapple with different positions about deforestation—including from loggers and farmers, industry, families that live in the Amazon, and environmentalists. These positions may directly oppose one another. Children will also take different positions about the causes, consequences, and solutions to deforestation.

Table 1-4 How Unit Addresses Dimensions of Civic Reasoning

Dispositions	This unit focuses on developing multiple dispositions of civic reasoning, including the following: • **Questioning:** Question how trees function and why they are important. Question which solutions for deforestation are most promising and why. • **Weighing Competing Evidence:** Examine and evaluate the different causes of/solutions for deforestation. • **Examining Multiple Points of View:** Consider how self-interests contribute to different perspectives about deforestation. Consider the impact of deforestation on humans and nonhumans. • **Listening to Others:** Listen to classmates' opinions and ideas about deforestation. • **Perspective-Taking:** Evaluate the perspectives represented by different authors/organizations and by fellow classmates.
Epistemology	The students must analyze a variety of self-interests and perspectives about deforestation. This will support systemic thinking and understanding about the ways environmental practices are tied to capitalism and livelihoods.
Ethics	Reading about trees can support empathizing with nonhuman organisms. It may help to foster an understanding of humans as interconnected with plants, animals, air, water, fungi, and nonliving entities. Considering different perspectives about deforestation (e.g., loggers and farmers, industry, children, environmentalists) can also grow empathy and develop systems thinking.

Table 1-5 How Unit Addresses Developmental Needs

The unit addresses various development needs:

- **Identity Development:** Consider how our own self-interests inform our perspectives about deforestation.
- **Self-Efficacy:** Take action by writing directly to an audience about deforestation.
- **Relevance:** Connect to the local regions where youth live, considering the particularities of deforestation on our own homes, environments, and communities.

Unit crafted by Rebecca Woodard

Table 2-1 Overview of Unit

Introduction	This inquiry is intended to support youth to empathize with others and take multiple perspectives as they consider the long-term consequences of climate change and (re) imagine potential futures. It is not designed to debate if climate change is real, or its causes; rather, it fosters civic dispositions of empathy and imagination. It also explores story as a tool that informs and shapes our ideas.
Topic	Empathy, Imagination, and (Re)imagining Possible Climate Futures
Essential questions	• In the future, how might different groups of humans (and/or nonhumans) experience and respond to a warming climate? • How do stories inform and shape our ideas?
Text set and rationale	The text set includes both multimodal informational texts and literature. The multimodal informational texts include visual imagery/photos and a climate impact map, both of which require students to analyze informational sources critically as they examine and hypothesize about the consequences of a warming climate. The literature includes a series of short stories from the cli fi genre, or "literature that deals with climate change. Generally speculative in nature but inspired by climate science, works of climate fiction may take place in the world as we know it [or] in the near future…imagining…potential futures based on how humanity responds to the impacts of climate change." ("Climate fiction," 2024). Both the nonfiction and fictional texts are included to help students consider the power of stories (through both image and word) to inform and shape ideas. As Beach et al. (2017) suggest, "climate change is a story" that can focus on different causes, consequences, and/or solutions; the English language arts can help us ask ourselves, "Which versions of the story do we hear and which do we not hear? Whose experience is visible and whose is invisible? Whose voices are heard and not heard?" (p. 10). **Focal Texts:** • **Multimodal Informational Texts:** ◦ Images/Photos: IPCC Photo Library ◦ Interactive Map: Climate Impact Map • **Literature/Cli Fi Short Stories:** ◦ "When the Snowshoe Hare Turns White" by Eileen Gunnell Lee ◦ "What the Dead Man Said" by Chinelo Onwualu

Text set and rationale *(continued)*

Supplemental Texts:

- **Multimodal Informational Texts:**
  - Images: California, cliff erosion; Miami flooding
- **Cli Fi Short Stories:**
  - "Eclipse Our Sins" by Tlotlo Tsamaase
  - "More Sea Than Tar" by Osahon Ize-Iyamu
- **Cli Fi Young Adult Novels:**
  - *Dry* by Neal Schusterman
  - *Orleans* by Sherri Smith
  - *Breathe* by Sarah Crossan
  - *Not a Drop to Drink* by Mindy McGinnis
  - *Trail of Lightning* by Rebecca Roanhorse
  - *The Ward* by Jordana Frankel

Pedagogical strategies

This is an open-ended exploration with no predetermined endpoint. As students analyze data sets in the forms of images and data maps, they discuss their understandings of the consequences of warming temperatures in small and large group settings, and engage one another's ideas by listening and respecting classmates' perspectives. They also critically analyze the sources and the climate stories being presented, considering, for example, the author's perspective and source. They also consider whose stories/perspectives are being told and whose are being left out. As they read cli fi literature, they analyze characters' perspectives and consider whether the climate futures represented are realistic. In small and large group settings, they discuss how these texts create different kinds of climate stories, and how these stories impact them and inform their ideas about climate change and climate action. Ultimately, they write their own cli fi stories, using a variety of narrative techniques.

Table 2-2 Literacy Demands of the Unit

Texts and sources of complexity

The sources of text complexity for each data set or text include the following:

- For the *series of images/photographs*—These images are conceptually/topically organized to align with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report (e.g., photos about "framing and context," photos about "mitigation pathways," photos about "impacts," photos about "strengthening the global response"). For those unfamiliar with climate change, this might be a lot of information to process and make sense of (including complex and unfamiliar vocabulary). Identifying the credibility of each source will be time consuming, since this is a compilation of images from different sources.
- For the *interactive map*—You can manipulate various aspects of this text (e.g., level of emissions, time period, probability). Time is needed to explore the various dimensions. The "methodology" description is dense and complex, making it hard for a layperson to assess validity/credibility.
- For *cli fi short stories*—Reading any narrative text requires some knowledge of narrative structure (e.g., how authors denote the passage of time, how we know when different characters are talking) and techniques (use of dialogue, inner thinking, action). Cli fi stories also tend to be situated in particular places, with particular histories; some students will need to build more knowledge about those places than others.

Literacy tasks (what students will produce)	Youth write their own cli fi stories, which will be shared with a broader audience (e.g., with families, online, other youth). The stories will utilize narrative structures and techniques.
Building prior knowledge	The focus of knowledge-building should be on current and future impacts/consequences of climate change. Students can share stories about how their families and friends have been impacted by changing weather (e.g., droughts, heat, flood). They can also explore and discuss recent and current events.
Pedagogical strategies for tackling the range and kinds of texts in the unit	Practices for addressing sources of complexity in these texts can include the following: • For the series of *images/photographs*—Read across each image, heading, and description. Make a conceptual map of how different images/concepts fit together. These images can be read alongside the *IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C*. More information can be found at the Climate Visuals Project. • For the *interactive map*—Choose one location on the U.S. map and look at it across the four time periods. Choose at least one more location on the global map and look at it across the four time periods. Annotate the critical indicators of relationships. • For *cli fi short stories*—Make annotations that include metacognitive notes (e.g., I don't understand; this makes me think of; I predict that) as well as labels for notes that capture the dimensions of reasoning you want students to be thinking about.

Table 2-3 Unit as Argumentation

Category of argumentation	**Arguments of judgment**—Youth make judgments about the kinds of consequences different people may experience related to climate change, and about the sorts of responses that will be required/helpful. **Arguments of policy**—Particularly as they write their own cli fi stories, some youth may consider policy issues and how policies are supporting or could and should support citizens as climate changes.
Possible contested positions	Social science research has identified unique audiences within the American public that each respond to the issue of climate change in their own distinct way: **Position 1 (Dismissive):** Climate change is not real, so there is no need to prepare for the future. **Position 2 (Doubtful):** Climate change is natural and the risks are greatly exaggerated. The climate has always changed, and people have adapted accordingly. **Position 3 (Cautious):** Climate change may be happening, but the consequences may not be serious. **Position 4 (Concerned):** Climate change is real and caused by human activities, but the most severe effects will not be felt for some time.

Possible contested positions *(continued)*	**Position 4 (Concerned):** Climate change is real and caused by human activities, but the most severe effects will not be felt for some time. **Position 5 (Alarmed):** Climate change is happening, caused by humans, and an urgent threat. It is already impacting many aspects of human life, and requires planning, cooperation, and innovation particularly for marginalized groups who are/will be differentially impacted. These contested positions may all be present in your classroom, to some extent or another; they will impact how students approach the unit and their engagement with the data sets and cli fi stories

Table 2-4 How Unit Addresses Dimensions of Civic Reasoning

Dispositions	This unit focuses on developing multiple dispositions of civic reasoning, including the following: • **Questioning:** Question what the future might be and reimagine what it could be. • **Weighing Competing Evidence:** Examine and evaluate different projections related to climate change. • **Examining Multiple Points of View:** Consider the impact of climate change on humans and/or nonhumans. • **Listening to Others:** Examine stories from different perspectives and representing different climate futures. • **Perspective-Taking:** Evaluate the perspectives represented in different stories, what is similar and different, and why.
Epistemology	The students must analyze a variety of informational texts in order to develop hypotheses about possible futures. They make intentional choices about the kinds of climate stories they tell (e.g., dismissive, hopeful, solution-oriented, distraught, assigning blame). They can look across the climate stories produced to understand how stories inform discourse and ideas.
Ethics	Climate story reading and writing may bring up a variety of conflicting points of view and ideas. Reading climate stories can support empathizing with different experiences. It may help to foster an understanding of humans as interconnected with plants, animals, air, water, fungi, and nonliving entities. Writing climate stories encourages perspective-taking and imagining the world in the future. It encourages thinking about the past and the future, and embracing complexity.

Table 2-5 How Unit Addresses Developmental Needs

The unit addresses various development needs:

- **Identity Development:** Consider how our own identities may inform our responses to the climate future.
- **Self-Efficacy:** Understand that humans can respond—and already are responding—to climate change in ways that help each other and the land.
- **Relevance/Use of Knowledge:** Connect to the local regions where youth live, considering the particularities of impact on our own homes, environments, and communities.

Gender Identity (Grades K–3)[4]

Unit crafted by Alessandra Ward

Table 3-1 Overview of Unit

Introduction

The purpose of this unit is to present the rich breadth of gender experiences that humans embody and to help young learners develop understanding, empathy, and appreciation for the diverse ways people express themselves across cultures and communities. Through carefully selected literature and pedagogical practices, this unit supports K-3 students' development by fostering respect for individual differences and building vocabulary for discussing differences respectfully and thoughtfully.

While gender identity might initially seem a complex topic for children in grades K–3, in fact, ideas about gender and gender identity become salient to children long before they enter kindergarten. Children become able to use speech to indicate gender categories as early as 18–24 months (Martin & Ruble, 2010). Children as young as two to three years are aware of and can apply stereotypical ideas about gender, such as assigning toys or colors to one gender versus another, and develop prejudices about gender as early as three to four years (King et al., 2021). Social practices in the wider environment, including the school environment, can facilitate the development of such prejudices (King et al., 2021).

Students' understanding of the diverse gender expressions from an early age has implications for their developmental trajectories, especially for transgender students. According to the Williams Institute, an estimated 300,000 youth (ages 13–17) identify as transgender, representing about 1.4% of the national population within that age range (Herman et al., 2022). Gender-diverse children and adolescents are at higher risk for mental and physical health issues such as depression, self-harm, eating disorders, and suicidality (Connolly et al., 2016). However, certain factors are protective against these risks. Particularly relevant to gender-diverse children and youth in school environments are being able to wear clothes and have outward appearances that match their internal identity, which can be accomplished through all-gender dress codes or uniform policies (Ceatha et al., 2021; Garey, 2022); being allowed to use chosen names and pronouns (Ceatha et al., 2021; Garey, 2022; Russell et al., 2018); and attending schools with gender inclusive and supportive policies (Garey, 2022; Johns et al., 2018) and gay-straight alliances (Johns et al., 2018).

This unit engages children in grades K–3 in conversations around gender roles and identity in developmentally appropriate ways. The unit does not address certain concepts around gender, such as medical/physical transition or the public debate over restroom use. Instead, children explore concepts around identity in general and how people use external expressions to signal how they feel inside. Children create multimodal compositions to communicate how characters in literature understand and express their identities. Children also work together to consider what a gender-inclusive school community and classroom might look like and reflect on how including everyone makes school a safe, happier place.

[4] In the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Mahmoud v. Taylor*, 606 U.S. ___ (2025), this report recommends that schools provide notice to parents and guardians before classroom instruction on LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum.

Gender Identity (Grades K–3)

Topic	Gender Identity
Essential questions	• What is gender identity, and how do people express it in different ways? • What can we do to be inclusive of people of all gender identities in our school community?
Text set and rationale	Focal Texts : • **Text Set 1:** What Is Identity? The function of this text set is to help students explore general ideas about identity and how we express who we are through our words and actions, including our cultural practices. It also introduces the idea that we are the best authority on our own identities. ◦ *Becoming Vanessa* by Vanessa Brantley-Newton ◦ *The Story of You* by Lisa Ann Scott ◦ *Neither* by Airlie Anderson ◦ *Red* by Michael Hall ◦ Video: "Identity Explained for Children" (Pop'n'Olly) • **Text Set 2:** Different Perspectives on Gender Roles. The function of this text set is to explore the diverse expressions of gender roles across time periods and cultures. The first text in this set grounds these ideas in a historical perspective (based on the life of Mary Edwards Walker, a physician born in 1832 who was arrested several times for wearing pants), and the final text depicts intergenerational conversations around gender roles, showing that people have questioned strict conceptualizations of gender roles for a long time. The set includes representations of multiple cultures (including non-Western cultures) to demonstrate that there is diversity in the ways that cultural communities consider gender. The set also includes informational texts that show how gender is expressed in diverse ways in the animal kingdom. ◦ *Mary Wears What She Wants* by Keith Negley ◦ Grades K–1: *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress* by Christine Baldacchino ◦ Grades 2–3: *Téo's Tutu* by Maryann Jacob Macias ◦ *Dancing in Thatha's Footsteps* by Srividhya Venkat ◦ Videos: ▪ "These Clownfish Switched Genders" (Odd Animal Specimens) ▪ "An Elephant's Tale: The Matriarch" (Wildlife Conservation Society) ▪ Grades 2–3: "Maned Lioness Displays Both Female and Male Traits" (Nature on PBS) ▪ Grades 2–3: "How Male Seahorses Carry Their Offspring" (Museum of Science)

Text set and rationale *(continued)*

- **Text Set 3: Gender Identity.** The function of this text set is to introduce concepts around gender identity explicitly. Specifically, the set introduces the following ideas: The gender you were assigned at birth may or may not match how you feel inside; it is possible to hold multiple gender identities simultaneously, and many Indigenous cultures have long honored such identities and expressions; your feelings about your gender identity may change over both short and long periods of time, or they may remain stable; and people use pronouns as one way of indicating to others how they understand their gender identity.
  - Grades K–1: *47,000 Beads* by Koja Adeyoha and Angel Adeyoha
  - Grades 2–3: *Ho'onani: Hula Warrior* by Heather Gale
  - *It Feels Good to Be Yourself* by Theresa Thorn
  - Grades K–1: *They, She, He, Me: Free to Be!* by Maya Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Smith-Gonzalez
  - Grades 2–3: *What Are Your Words? A Book About Pronouns* by Katherine Locke

Pedagogical strategies

This exploration encourages children to engage with literature and informational texts as they craft both descriptive writing and policy-related opinions that are supported with reasons and information. As students read and analyze literature, they empathize with the experiences of the characters and subjects, including characters with diverse gender identities and expressions. They explore the social and emotional aspects of identity development, as well as the consequences that attitudes toward gender have for communities. Students also engage with informational texts, texts explaining the role of pronouns in communicating gender identity, and scientific texts about gender representation in the natural world. Ultimately, children create multimodal descriptive pieces, including articulating their understanding of a character's identities and traits, particularly as they relate to gender, and potentially exploring how gender operates in their own lives and school community.

This unit supports the multidimensional identity development occurring through the K-3 years. As K-3 students begin to understand their cultural and social identities in relation to others, build awareness of physical growth, and develop their sense of fairness and moral understanding, literature creates a safe space for students to explore and respect diverse experiences and perspectives, feel assured and included regarding their own identities, and learn to use respectful language for talking about differences and similarities among people. This approach recognizes that even K-3 students can engage in these conversations that support the development of skills essential for their success as learners and future citizens in our diverse society.

Table 3-2 Literacy Demands of the Unit

Texts and sources of complexity	The sources of text complexity for the various texts include the following: • **Quantitative complexity** (i.e., readability; for this reason, some texts have been identified as either K–1 or 2–3) • **Structural complexity:** o need to make inferences to understand character traits, motivations, and actions, as well as to predict possible next events in the story o tracking story elements (e.g., problem/solution, multiple changes of setting) and theme personification o dream sequences and sequences that take place in characters' imaginations o back/front matter containing biographical text to accompany a narrative o back/front matter containing descriptive text about particular cultural practices • **Linguistic complexity:** o figurative language o sophisticated vocabulary o inclusion of languages other than English
Literacy tasks	Children write • individually: o a portrait and description of a character of the student's choice that articulates the character's traits (including pronouns) using sophisticated vocabulary and that visually reflects that character's identities • collectively: a discussion about gender-inclusive policies for school administration (teachers may address one or more, considering a larger number of policies with older children) o Examples of policies children might consider include the following: ▪ How should we line up? ▪ What kind of language should our teachers and other adults use to describe us as a group? ▪ How should we form teams in PE or at recess? ▪ How should we reflect people's chosen words in school communications?
Building prior knowledge	Short videos in text sets can build knowledge prior to reading and discussing the picture books. Some books also include front/back matter and publisher's guides that provide additional information on concepts addressed in the text.

Pedagogical strategies for tackling the range and kinds of texts in the unit	Practices for addressing sources of complexity in these texts can include the following: • teaching comprehension strategies such as making inferences and identifying story elements and themes • using text engagement strategies such as Questioning the Author (Beck et al., 1996) • identifying cultural text sets (everyday texts, images, videos, and music that they interpret as part of their everyday practices that embody the technical interpretive problems students will need to detect and analyze as they read the stories) that help students practice making inferences and identifying story elements and themes • teaching key vocabulary and providing opportunities to use target words across multiple diverse contexts • teaching strategies for identifying the meaning of unknown words, including but not limited to the application of morphology • teaching informational text structure, including how this applies to video texts • building knowledge about the range of cultural practices depicted in the texts and inviting students to share similar practices from their own cultures • differentiating task context (i.e., reading texts aloud, in small groups, in pairs, independently) and practicing heterogeneous, flexible grouping strategies

Table 3-3 Unit as Argumentation

Category of argumentation	**Arguments of judgment**—Children consider questions about what makes a good/inclusive classroom and school community, particularly as it relates to gender identity.
Possible contested positions	Children will grapple with different positions about developmentally appropriate gender roles (e.g., assigning certain colors, toys, clothing, hairstyles, or activities to a certain gender). This includes considering how perspectives on gender roles have changed over time (e.g., women were once forbidden from wearing pants in Western cultures). Children will also take different positions about common school practices such as lining up, forming teams, using certain language (e.g., alternatives to phrases such as "Good morning, boys and girls"), and practicing inclusion in play (e.g., allowing children to take on roles that may not correspond with their assigned gender).

Table 3-4 How Unit Addresses Dimensions of Civic Reasoning

Dispositions	This unit focuses on developing multiple dispositions of civic reasoning, including the following: • **Questioning:** Children are encouraged to reflect on their own experiences: What is most important to them? What do they value? How do they feel inside? How would they want others to address them? Children are also encouraged to question the author as they read. • **Weighing Competing Evidence:** Children consider differences across characters' points of view and how characters' identities may inform how they experience the world. • **Examining Multiple Points of View:** Children explore how people who hold similar gender identities or who use the same pronouns may still express their gender in diverse ways. In other words, there is no right way to be a certain gender. • **Listening to Others:** Children are encouraged to listen to others' experiences and perspectives and to respect the speaker as the ultimate authority on their own experiences and identities. • **Perspective-Taking:** Children are invited to put themselves in characters' shoes and to imagine how they would feel or how they would experience situations of inclusion/exclusion. As they consider school policies, this extends to taking the perspective of other students who may have different identities and needs than their own: How would different groups experience school policies, and how can we make them more inclusive?
Epistemology	Children are taught to use textual clues to identify character traits and to infer characters' motivations, feelings, and potential actions. However, an important distinction must be made: When it comes to identity (gender or otherwise), you cannot infer how someone identifies. The best way to know how someone identifies is to ask them. In texts, this means reading closely to see the words the characters use to describe themselves. In life, this means asking others directly, and understanding that their identity may be in flux or that they may not be ready to share that information.
Ethics	Children develop empathy for the experiences of people who hold marginalized gender identities and/or whose identities may not always be honored by those around them. Simultaneously, children learn how exclusionary practices, including a desire to enforce strict gender roles, may be rooted in fear of what people do not understand. Finding empathetic ways to educate and thus reduce the fear is one way of moving toward greater inclusivity.

Table 3-5 How Unit Addresses Developmental Needs

The unit addresses various developmental needs:

- **Identity Development:** Children are explicitly guided and supported in developing a conceptualization of identity generally and of gender identity specifically.
- **Safety:** Classroom routines and community-building are carefully structured to create a space where children feel safe expressing their own experiences and identities and where they know their identities will be respected by those around them.
- **Self-Efficacy:** Children are given opportunities to develop an understanding of the diverse ways people express their identities in multimodal ways that honor different linguistic and cultural repertoires and that allow for nonverbal expression. Children are positioned as powerful members of the school community whose opinions on policy are valid and worth considering.
- **Relevance:** The school policies children consider are all highly relevant to the lives of elementary school students and represent practices that students encounter weekly, if not daily.

Unit crafted by Rick Coppola

Table 3-1 Overview of Unit

Introduction	These lessons are designed to support students in building knowledge about the history of voting rights in the United States to grapple with contemporary issues related to the voting process in the United States and its role in advancing a vision of society that supports democracy. Initially, students will build their background knowledge by examining the history of voting rights in the United States. They will work toward understanding current voting laws at both the federal and state levels. Students will extend their investigation by examining literary texts that center on issues related to voting (e.g., the importance of exercising one's voice, the necessity of participation in a democracy, the rights of being a citizen of the United States). These foundational explorations will support students in an inquiry to explore contemporary issues related to voting, specifically expansions and restrictions to voter access and how that protects and inhibits the democratic process. Students will take action by developing and advancing arguments around the criteria that should be in place to determine who gets the right to vote.
Topic	Voting Rights: A Closer Look at Voting in the United States
Essential questions	• **Building Background Knowledge:** What does history tell us about the right to vote in the United States? How have ideas about who is considered "American" shifted over time? Who is currently eligible to vote in the United States? • **Deepening Understandings by Drawing on Literary Texts:** How can literary texts and first-person perspectives deepen understandings about voting and the voting process? How can literary texts support the moral and ethical concerns around voting rights? • **Engaging to Explore Contemporary Issues:** What issues frame the debate on voting rights? What are the tradeoffs between voter integrity and voter accessibility? What criteria should be in place to determine who gets the right to vote?

Text set and rationale	**Building Background Knowledge:**
	Historical Perspectives:
	• Historical Timeline "US Voting Rights Timeline"
	  ◦ This website provides a chronological listing of important dates and descriptions related to the history of voting rights in the U.S. While it contains important information, it's conceptually dense.
	• National Archives Primary Source Document: "Voting Rights Act" (1965)
	  ◦ This document requires technical skills related to reading texts within the discipline of History. It includes references to landmark court cases and unfamiliar vocabulary terminology that would require additional scaffolding and support.

Text set and rationale *(continued)*

- Excerpt from One Person No Vote: The Voting Rights Act
  - This text presents an excerpt from a larger book and may require additional contextual framing. There are references to historical figures that may be unfamiliar to students and some specialized vocabulary.
- Masterclass AudioVisual Clip: "March Ahead: Remembering John Lewis" [minute 24:00 - 33:00]
  - This excerpt requires a little frontloading to introduce former United States Representative John Lewis and his significance to the civil rights movement. Closed captioning should be activated to more fully engage students.
- Court Case Summary: *Shelby County v. Holder (2013):* Shelby County v. Holder Case Summary
  - This court case presents specialized and technical vocabulary related to law. The complex sentences are conceptually dense and may require scaffolded support for students to understand the language.
- *New York Times* Article: "Between the Lines of the Voting Rights Act Opinion"
  - The article includes text box excerpts of the Supreme Court Justices' opinions, reflecting the language of the law. Helping students understand these excerpts will require additional support although the article does explain the meaning of these excerpts in the body of the text.

Current Perspectives:

- Checklist: "Who Can and Can't Vote in U.S. Elections"
  - The bulleted list is conceptually dense and includes hyperlinks that expand on various exceptions to the voter eligibility qualifications.
- Time Magazine Article: "The Supreme Court Could Gut the Voting Rights Act Even Further"
  - The article requires background knowledge to understand that this case focuses on an Alabama lawsuit challenging a congressional map that dilutes the voting power of Black citizens. Students need to understand the far-reaching implications of Supreme Court decisions.
- Learning for Justice Website: Voting and Voices
  - Teachers will need to examine the website in advance to pull relevant materials.
- Poster: Five Myths About Voting
  - The poster is easy to understand, presenting five myths and facts to dispel those myths. Students may be unfamiliar with the myths, so the poster may assume background knowledge they do not possess.
- Movie: "This Land" directed by Matthew Palmer (2020)
  - The movie has been deemed appropriate for older adolescents and may require parental permission. The teacher may opt to curate age-appropriate excerpts.

Text set and rationale *(continued)*

- Movie: "This Land" directed by Matthew Palmer (2020)
  - The movie has been deemed appropriate for older adolescents and may require parental permission. The teacher may opt to curate age-appropriate excerpts.
- Movie: "Suppressed and Sabotaged: The Fight to Vote" directed by Robert Greenwald
  - This documentary focuses on one side of the issue and the teacher would have to be ntentional about problematizing the movie or asking critical questions to interrogate or surface the perspectives presented.

Deepening Understandings by Drawing on Literary Texts:Fiction:

- Picture Book: Lillian's Right to Vote
  - The book offers a humanizing introduction to voting and the Civil Rights Movement through one elderly African American woman. Students will need additional context around the Fifteenth Amendment and the march from Selma to Montgomery.
- Poem/video: "Vote" by Nikki Giovanni
  - This poem explores the importance of exercising one's right to vote. The use of figurative language adds complexity to the poem. In addition, Giovanni makes references to lynching and gerrymandering, which may require additional instruction.
- Poem: "women's voting rights at one hundred (but who's counting?)" by Evie Shockley
  - The poem is conceptually dense. It includes references to historical events (e.g. activist Fannie Lou Hamer and Stacey Abrams and her 2018 gubernatorial campaign) and allusions for poetic effect (e.g. the use of Jane Crow to describe the prejudice against women related to voting rights).
- Novel: The Voting Booth by Brandy Colbert
  - This novel explores the legacy of Fannie Lou Hamer through Marva, a high school voting rights activist who is old enough to vote in her first election. A variety of voter suppression tactics are explored, some of which may require additional support.
- Novel: Stella by Starlight by Sharon Draper
  - The story is set in 1932 in North Carolina. Students will need an understanding of the historical context of the time period, racial inequalities existing during the Depression era, and background on the Ku Klux Klan.

Non-fiction:

- Book: *One Person, No Vote: How Not All Voters Are Treated Equally* by Carol Anderson with Tonya Bolden (2019)
  - This non-fiction book explores the aftermath of the 2013 Supreme Court decision that undid the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This book unpacks how voter suppression works in a way that is accessible for young people.
- Picture Book: Equality's Call: The Story of Voting Rights in America by Deborah Diesen (2020)
  - The book presents poetic verse as a way to frame the history of voting rights from the founding fathers to the present. Students may be unfamiliar with many of the historical figures being represented across the pages of the book.

Text set and rationale *(continued)*

- Picture Book: "Because They Marched: The People's Campaign for Voting Rights That Changed America" by Russell Freedman (2016)
  - This account details the events of Bloody Sunday and the events that led up to and after this historical event. The book offers rich illustrations and opportunities for students to examine visuals as text. Providing students with some support around the literacy practices associated with reading in History (e.g. sourcing, contextualization, corroboration) will make this a more meaningful experience.
- Political Cartoons: Voting Rights Via Political Cartoons
  - Political cartoons require critical comprehension skills. These include contextual knowledge to understand the cultural and historical events being represented. Visual literacy skills are necessary to understand symbolism, exaggeration, analogy and irony. Finally students must have a firm understanding of author bias to critically read the cartoons.
- Voting Rights in the United States
  - The three stories demonstrate how voting restrictions can impact groups of people in different ways. Students will need to be able to compare and contrast, to understand both the nuances and themes that surface across the various texts.
- "Voting Rights Restoration Gives Felons a Voice in More States"
  - The article discusses the initiatives of several states to restore voting rights for previously incarcerated individuals. It requires an understanding of how this stance is a shift from harsher perspectives held in the 80's and 90's. The article also features hyperlinked material which takes students to additional articles to build contextual understanding.

Engaging to Explore Contemporary Issues:

- Interactive Map: Map: See Which States Have Restricted Voter Access, And Which States Have Expanded it
  - Students need to be able to read and interpret maps and understand the color coding scheme. The various hyperlinks can be assistive or distracting for students. At the bottom of the webpage, students need support to engage with the endnotes (written in smaller font) that provide details about how particular states have expanded or restricted voter access.
- Interactive Website: Voting Laws Roundup: 2024
  - The text features hyperlinked endnotes, which contain state abbreviations and the corresponding legislation being referenced (e.g. GA S.B.189.). The content is conceptually dense and may require the teacher to create a graphic organizer to assist students in organizing the information presented.
- Interactive Nonprofit Vote Website: How to Vote in Your State (provides voting guidelines state by state)
- This website takes you away from the state map landing page as soon as you click on a state. Requires a lot of toggling back and forth to compare and contrast the rules that guide voting in particular states.

Pedagogical strategies

This text set has been curated to support a variety of entry points in the discussion around voter rights. While it is recommended that teachers use texts from each of the three phases of the inquiry, there is flexibility. Teachers can pursue specific lines of inquiry based on the standards or student interests.

Table 3-2 Literacy Demands of the Text

Literacy tasks (what students will produce)	Students could be supported in writing an op-ed (either as a small group and/or class) and send these to local newspaper outlets. Alternatively, students could publish these op-eds on the school website or write letters to their elected representatives tailored to voting issues specific to their local contexts. Students may also be encouraged to draw on their expertise with various social media platforms (i.e. Tik TikTok, Flip Grid, Instagram) to disseminate their arguments. These could become multi-modal arguments.
Building prior knowledge	Students will need to have a foundational understanding of how voting works in the United States and the role of the states in refining voting laws. Students will be supported in building their prior knowledge as they complete various readings from the first section of readings: Building Background Knowledge.
Pedagogical strategies for tackling the range and kinds of texts in the unit	The text set employs a range of texts (in both genre and type) that invite multiple entry points. **Participation Structures:** A variety of participation structures should be employed after students have time to examine the documents independently Working in pairs and small groups and collaborative conversations will support robust meaning-making. **Cultural Modeling:** As a starting point, drawing on everyday texts familiar to the lives of the students (e.g., uniform debate, cell phone policy) that explore contested issues closer to their own lives can support students in feeling efficacious as they draw on their everyday knowledge to better understand the tradeoffs and tensions in negotiating the technical interpretive problems associated with voting rights. **Talking to the Text:** This annotation (see The Reading Apprenticeship Framework by Schoenbach, Greenleaf, and Murphy, 2016) can be a means to elicit students' confusions, questions, connections, and other thinking about how they are reading and thinking through the text as they read. **Graphic Organizers:** The use of organizers can be a way to support students in streamlining their thinking by examining the same dimensions across multiple texts (e.g., identifying the author, the main argument, perspectives uplifted, perspectives that are missing, etc).

Table 3-3 Units as Argumentation

Category of argumentation	**Argument of policy**—Students present issues that frame the debate on voting rights and discuss the tradeoffs between voter integrity and voter accessibility. **Argument of judgment**—Students consider criteria that should be in place to determine who gets the right to vote as well as discuss why these criteria are necessary.
Possible contested positions	To vote, one must be: (1) a U.S. citizen (non-citizens are allowed to vote in local elections in some areas), (2) meet state residency requirements (you can be homeless and still meet these requirements, (3) be 18 years of age by Election Day (16-year-olds are allowed to vote in local elections in some areas), and (4) register to vote by state's deadline, if applicable (USAGov, 2024). Although voting qualifications in the U.S. are not considered contested, there does exist variance in how these qualifications are taken up, state by state. **Position 1:** Some states have made it more difficult to vote to promote voter suppression and perpetuate racism. **Position 2:** Some states have made voting more difficult to deter corruption and fraud. **Position 3:** Some states have made it easier to vote by expanding opportunities for early voting to increase voter turnout. **Position 4:** Some states have made it easier to vote which has negatively affected the integrity of the voting process and increased chances for widespread voter fraud. **Position 5:** States are changing voting laws, not to support democratic participation in the voting process, but to maintain the status quo and ensure the current political party remains in power.

Table 3-4 How the Unit Addresses Dimensions of Civic Reasoning

Dispositions	This unit focuses on developing multiple dispositions of civic reasoning, including the following: • **Questioning:** Students will closely read or annotate the text to surface their questions, which will be used to drive instruction. Students will interrogate the positions of their peers by asking questions focused on the strength of the evidence-warrant relations. • **Weighing Competitive Evidence:** Students will examine how evidence can be leveraged to advance particular stances within an argument of judgment. Students will understand how warrants function as the assumptions that link the evidence to the claim. • **Examining Multiple Points of View:** Examining voter access and integrity from multiple perspectives will support students in understanding the dimensions of the debate and how politics plays a role in advancing arguments about voting laws. • **Listening to Others**: Providing students with choices in how to explore the issue of voting rights and introducing multiple points of view create the contextual conditions to support debate.

Dispositions ***(continued)***	• **Perspective-Taking:** Students will be presented with a variety of perspectives to complicate the problem space of determining how to reconcile issues of voter access and the integrity of elections. As students generate criteria of who should gain access to vote, they will have to set their perspective against others.
Epistemology	The nature of the inquiry itself, weighing voter integrity against accessibility, invites complexity. There are no simplistic answers to these questions, especially when considering that voter laws are determined, to a large degree, at the state level. Additionally, having students develop a set of criteria to determine who gets the right to vote is a matter of judgment, and the strength of the argument rests on the evidence and accompanying warrants.
Ethics	Supporting the inquiry into voting rights through literature invites students into life-worlds, some of which may be familiar, while others are not. The goal of leveraging literature in this way is to build students' capacities to understand multiple points of view, taking into consideration how identity and social positioning inform one's position in the first place. Literature serves as an entry point to support students' moral and ethical development.

Table 3-5 How Unit Addresses Developmental Needs

This is relevant to students in their preparation to assume the responsibility of participating fully as a member of a democratic society. One way this occurs is through exercising one's right to vote.

- **Identity Development:** As adolescents, students need opportunities to understand how to create the change they wish to see in the world. Exercising one's right to vote is one way to make one's voice heard, choosing candidates that align with one's belief systems.
- **Self-Efficacy:** Students will be supported as they move through the inquiry, starting with building background knowledge, moving to build their depth of understanding, and finally taking action by applying the issue to their own lives.
- **Relevance/Use of Knowledge:** Students will apply the voting criteria to their own lives, both as they work through lessons that explore student government voting as well as when they develop their criteria for voting

Confederate Monument Debates (Grades 6–8)

Unit crafted by Johari Harris

Table 5-1 Overview of Unit

Introduction	This inquiry is intended to support middle school students to weigh multiple perspectives related to the role and place of Confederate monuments in the modern day, considering the history and factors which contributed to their creation. Through this lesson, students will learn to develop skills to examine historical texts and focus their debate on what should be done with these monuments today. Teachers will establish clear ground rules for respectful discourse to ensure all students can engage safely with this topic, particularly given the contentious debates around this topic. The culminating assignment could be a letter for their political representatives or an op-ed synthesizing their dialogue into a cohesive argument.
Topic	Confederate Monument Debates
Essential questions	• What were the key causes of the civil war? • ConfederateWhat is the Lost Cause myth? • What was the context in which the Confederate monuments emerged? • What are the perspectives people hold towards them at time of creation and today?
Text set and rationale	This unit includes numerous types of nonfiction and historical fiction texts to provide students with a breadth of information related to Confederate monuments and the history behind them. This unit includes primary sources such as Confederate states (Mississippi) secession documents, political speeches, enslaved persons recollections, as well as summaries and opinion pieces related to the role of Confederate monuments in present day. **Text Set 1: Nonfiction Primary Sources** • Confederate Constitution • Mississippi Secession Declaration • Slavery as a Positive Good Speech by John C. Calhoun • Cornerstone Speech by Alexander H. Stephens • Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl by Harriet Jacobs (a slave girl's recollections from Virginia) • Black Union Soldiers Pension Records **Text Set 2: Historical Fiction** • Day of Tears by Julius Lester • In the Shadow of Liberty by Kenneth C Davis • Unbound: A Novel in Verse by Ann E Burg

Text set and rationale	**Text Set 3: Op-Eds (Secondary Source)** • Confederate Monument, Shunned by One Kentucky City, Is Welcomed in Another *(The New York Times)* • An Old Debate Meets a New Solution for N.C.'s Confederate Statues *(The New York Times)* • Atlanta to Add Context to Confederate Monuments *(AP News)* • Confederate Statues Were Built To Further A 'White Supremacist Future *(NPR)* **Multimedia Resource Set: History of Confederate Monuments in the United States** • Podcast: Confederate Monuments with Dr. Karen Cox *(Reckoning with Jason Herbert)* • Images: Pictures related to Confederate Monuments Debate • Video: History of Confederate Monuments in the US • Lesson Handout: The Lost Cause Myth *(Center for Race in Public Education, University of Virginia)*
Pedagogical strategies	These readings and resources provide middle school students with a range of nonfiction and fiction materials that allow them to consider multiple perspectives while having the foundational knowledge of the roots of Confederate monuments. Through engagement with these texts, students will be able to work collectively to form educated opinions about what should be done with Confederate monuments that still exist today. They will see models of persuasive nonfiction text (e.g., op-eds), creative nonfiction, and historical fiction. Being presented with a range of options on how to communicate information and/or a position effectively will serve their own writing when they are tasked with creating a persuasive letter outlining their position on what should be done as it pertains to Confederate monuments.
Texts and sources of complexity	**Non-Fiction Primary Sources** • There are policy and legal briefings, which include legal jargon. Summaries are available to support comprehension of the legal documents. **Historical Fiction** • Students will need to understand the purpose of the historical fiction genre. The texts also include emotional retellings of the lives of enslaved people. **Op-eds** • Students should be reminded of the goals of persuasive writing and the lens with which one should interpret the position being presented. Rather than passively accepting the position, students should consider it within the context of the primary sources and multiple perspectives.
Literacy tasks (what students will produce)	Students could write persuasive letters to their political representatives outlining what they think should be done with regard to Confederate monuments and have the option to mail the letters to their actual representatives.

Building prior knowledge	There are various ways to build upon students' prior knowledge including a Socratic style discussion about what is already known and what students still have questions about. Teachers can also pull from the resource set list to prompt discussion including reviewing pictures, watching videos, or listening to a podcast.
Pedagogical strategies for tackling the range and types of texts in the unit	**Practices for addressing sources of complexity in these texts can include the following:** • For the *non-fiction primary sources*, students can practice reading a section of a document in small groups, noting what they understand and what they need more information on; as a class, the teacher can guide the process of locating additional outside information to support comprehension of the text. • For *historical fiction*, the class can read a section together and discuss the literary techniques of the genre. • For the *op-eds*, the class can read an op-ed together and discuss the persuasive techniques employed by the author in their argument.

Table 5-3 Unit as Argumentation

Category of argumentation	After reading through the materials and before writing the persuasive letter, students should work in small groups to engage in transactive discourse (where group members are working collectively to transform the argument) around the following questions: **Argumentation of Fact and Argumentation of Judgment** Student should engage in both argumentation of fact and judgment to discern between factual claims and evaluative judgments. They might explore questions such as: • Argumentation of Fact: ◦ What are the arguments for the central cause of the civil war? ◦ Based on what you have read, how have monuments impacted the lives of the people in the communities where they are located? • Argumentation of Judgement: ◦ Who should determine the maintenance and removal of Confederate statues? ◦ Do you think Confederate monuments should be evaluated for removal on a case-by-case basis or should there be a more uniform approach to how they are handled? Why or why not? **Argumentation of Policy** Taking into consideration what they discussed in groups, students should write a persuasive argument answering the following question: • There are varying opinions about what should be done with Confederate monuments. Based on what you have read and discussed, write a letter to your political representative or an op-ed in which you detail your recommended course of action regarding Confederate monuments moving forward. This solution should take into consideration the different perspectives of people affected by Confederate monuments.

Possible contested positions	**Some possible positions may include:** **Position 1:** Confederate monuments should be removed immediately. **Position 2:** Confederate monuments should be left alone. **Position 3:** Confederate monuments should be removed from their current locations and placed in museums and/or historical context must be added to the existing monuments.

Table 5-4 How Unit Addresses Dimensions of Civic Reasoning

Dispositions	**This unit focuses on developing multiple dispositions of civic reasoning, including the following:** • **Questioning:** Question the messaging that the presence of Confederate monuments sends. • **Weighing Competing Evidence:** Examine and evaluate different arguments that have emerged related to what should be done with Confederate monuments. • **Examining Multiple Points of View:** Consider multiple perspectives of those who feel intimately connected (in positive and negative ways) to Confederate monuments • **Listening to Others:** Listen to classmates' positions and use positions to collectively craft the most effective argument. • **Perspective-Taking:** Evaluate the perspectives represented by different authors.
Epistemology	The students will read about key historical moments and events and how they relate to Confederate monuments. This historical understanding will support students' ability to link historical processes to current events and support systemic thinking and understanding.
Ethics	Historical non-fiction will provide students with the opportunity to engage with the perspectives of the people who were most affected by the confederacy and the civil war (e.g., the enslaved, soldiers). The historical non-fiction readings will highlight the lived realities of persons during that time period.

Table 5-5 How Unit Addresses Developmental Needs

The unit addresses various developmental needs of adolescents:

- **Competence**—This unit encourages student-led discussions and student-drafted letters, providing opportunities for them to feel competent.
- **Belonging**—The assignment gives them the opportunity to work collaboratively in discussions with one another, rather than in opposition, providing the potential to increase perspective taking.
- **Autonomy**—The writing prompt is to be completed independently, which allows students to provide their own perspective on the best possible solution.
- **Moral Reasoning Abilities**—This unit discusses middle school students' ability to understand the interplay between society and self. Therefore, the discussion questions probe the relationship between the individual, groups, and society to support students' critical thinking of this relationship.

Dress Codes (Grades 6–12)

Unit crafted by Peter Smagorinsky

Table 4-1 Overview of Unit

Introduction	This inquiry takes an issue present in every school—the dress code—and uses it as the basis for teaching argumentation grounded in Toulmin's claim-data-warrant-rebuttal formulation. In that dress codes affect all students, vary in content, embody ideologies and cultural biases, and are amenable to disagreement, they provide an accessible, socially critical focus for engaging in argumentation. The instruction is designed to promote students' inductive thinking, based on their informal knowledge about propriety and their analysis of documents that express conflicting beliefs and policies regarding appropriate attire in school. Their task is to determine their own dress codes and argue in defense of them. This product will follow from discussions requiring listening and civic discourse that engage ideas respectfully. Not only does this approach validate different perspectives, it takes advantage of them to provide contrast and thus the sharpening of argumentative points.
Topic	Argumentation: Analyzing School Dress Codes
Essential questions	The following material provides four different ways to establish a dress code, followed by one supporting argument and one dissenting argument. Read each rationale for the perspective and think about the degree to which it is persuasive. • Should there be a dress code in school? Why or why not? If so, what should it prohibit? • What are the claims? What are the illustrations, and are they justified by warrants? Is opposition anticipated, and if so, is it persuasively rebutted?
Text set and rationale	Argumentation—the advancement of a point of view—is an essential form of engagement in human life. There has always been disagreement among humans, on matters great and small. Argument was formalized among ancient rhetoricians as among the essential modes of expression for all citizens to practice responsibly. Argumentation has thus been among the writing genres built into the English curriculum and undertaken in other disciplines in which students take and defend positions on important questions.
Pedagogical strategies	The instruction is constructivist in that the answers are open-ended and of the students' own determination. Students analyze data sets in the form of school dress codes, discuss their merits and problems in small and large group settings, engage one another's ideas by listening and respecting classmates' perspectives, generate a code they believe would be fair and nondiscriminatory, and construct arguments explaining their support of the code they propose.

Table 4-2 Literacy Demands of the Unit

Texts and sources of complexity	Students need to know how to attend to a document's points, interrogate its reliability and validity, engage with opposing perspectives, resolve discrepancies, and formulate and defend a policy proposal. Depending on which materials are included, the text complexity will vary. This component enables teachers to adjust the activity to students of different levels of school readiness, age, and maturity. If materials that include legal definitions are included, students will need to understand new vocabulary terms. This instruction might involve learning new meanings for familiar terms, such as "First Amendment rights" that protect religious expression but not the promotion of drugs or alcohol. Religious expression protects the wearing of head-scarves, rosaries, cross jewelry, turbans, and yarmulkes, which are religious/cultural articles of clothing protected as free speech. Because many of the documents will come from public sources, they will have high "readability" and thus not pose great syntactic or vocabulary challenges. Where they involve complexity is in the "density of propositions/ideas" and the conceptual load they involve as students engage with a variety of competing positions, in turn requiring them to work at their greatest levels of articulation. **Focal Texts:** "Uniforms vs. Dress Codes" "School Uniforms, Dress Codes, and Free Expression: What's the Balance?" "Should Public School Dress Codes Ban Political Expression?" "High School Dress Codes Should Be History" "Dress Code Policy" "School Dress Codes & Uniforms" "Why There Shouldn't Be School Dress Codes" "Dress Code & Uniform Policy" in *Palmetto Charter School Student Handbook* **Supplemental Texts:** Videos: • "Kid With Concealed Weapons" • "My School Dress Codes" • "Are School Dress Codes Sexist and Racist?" • "Honor Roll Student Suspended Over Dress Code" • "This Is What Dress Codes Actually Do" • "Teens Slam School's 'Sexist' Dress Code" **Pro/Con Opinion and Report:** • School Dress Codes and Uniform Policies • "Do Uniforms Make Schools Better?" • "19 School Dress Code Pros and Cons" • "Bulletproof Armor for School Children?"

Texts and sources of complexity *(continued)*	**News Stories:** • "Black Students Sue Georgia School Over Blocked Confederate Flag Protest" • "North Carolina School's Skirts-Only Dress Code for Girls Violates Title IX, Court Rules" • "PCS Dress Code to Remain Unchanged for Upcoming School Year" • "Bibb County Schools Recently Changed Its Dress Code, and Not All Parents Are Happy" • "Court Cases Involving School Uniforms"
Literacy tasks (what students will produce)	• Dress codes for implementation in their schools • Arguments supporting the dress codes they generate
Building prior knowledge	Every student has been subject to a dress code since beginning school. They therefore have extensive knowledge of existing rules and critiques of them emerging from their affiliation groups. This knowledge works in conjunction with the formal sets of rules they analyze for this activity.
Pedagogical strategies for tackling the range and kinds of texts in the unit	Learn procedures for analyzing data in relation to constructing arguments on civic issues. Possible Source: Study Guide for Teaching Argument Writing

Table 4-3 Unit as Argumentation

Category of argumentation	The arguments will rely on facts about school dress policies, involve judgments about which rules are fair, and result in a policy recommendation about what a dress code should include. This unit thus does not privilege any single category of argumentation, assuming rather that policies are products of facts and judgments.
Possible contested positions	The topic of dress codes inevitably generates differing perspectives. **Position 1:** Some might find that dress codes that ban certain clothing styles (such as tank tops and bra tops) are unevenly enforced against girls and may create a sense of body shame among girls. **Position 2:** Some might argue that stricter dress codes will help minimize peer pressure and distractions. **Position 3:** Some might find the banning of racialized and ethnic clothing to be a means of reducing conflict over political positions emerging from race and ethnicity. **Position 4:** Some might argue that racialized and ethnic clothing is a source of pride and affiliation that should not be policed. The potential for conflicting views is available for every point in a policy and thus is a good topic for teaching argumentation as critical to the civic discourse that involves listening, respecting, and engaging with opposing points of view.

Table 4-4 How Unit Addresses Dimensions of Civic Reasoning

Dispositions	**Questioning:** Interrogating dress code documents helps to understand their origins, embedded values, biases, and other perspectives. **Weighing Competing Evidence:** The variety of dress code rules and rationales necessitates attention to multiple perspectives and arguments in the formulation of a new code. **Examining Multiple Points of View:** The various dress codes range from "no dress code" to those with specific forbidden attire, requiring students to evaluate many points of view to arrive at their own. **Listening to Others:** The use of conflicting perspectives requires students to listen to one another's points, and those of text authors, as a way to synthesize understandings into a new perspective. **Perspective-Taking:** Ultimately, the students establish their own perspective in the relief provided by many others.
Epistemology	The students must analyze a variety of dress code–related documents in order to understand each perspective and determine which views work in service of their own points.
Ethics	Dress codes need to respond to a host of interests and values. Students must listen to one another's conflicting points of view and priorities, and use them to modify and sharpen their own points. Their ultimate decisions need to serve the whole school community and not just people like themselves.

Table 4-5 How Unit Addresses Developmental Needs

The activity puts students in charge of deciding what makes the best school dress code, promoting self-efficacy. The topic is highly relevant to all students, given that they are all subject to dress codes, and the discussions might help some students see the issue from a perspective they had never taken before. The instruction is designed to make the classroom a safe space to discuss contentious issues and reduce hostilities to promote civic reasoning and discourse.

CONCLUSION

We have argued in this report that literacy is central to civic reasoning and discourse. It is also central to learning within and across content areas in the K–12 sector. We have sought to address two challenges: (1) the isolation of addressing civic reasoning and discourse only in civics and U.S. history courses, and (2) the proposition that addressing contested and complex topics in the civic domain will somehow take needed time away from critical literacy instruction. Rather, we have offered both a rationale and exemplars of instruction that can connect complex reading and argumentation to efforts to wrestle with questions in the civic domain. We have gone to some length in articulating details regarding the teaching of reading comprehension, both generic and in the disciplines, because the model of instruction connecting civic reasoning and discourse through literacy practices requires a detailed and technical analysis of what students need to know and be able to do to critically interrogate texts.

It is clear from NAEP's reading results over the decades that as a country we continue to struggle with how to teach comprehension (Forzani et al., 2022). We wrestle currently over how we address phonics, decoding, and fluency along with comprehension in the primary grades (Tierney & Pearson, 2024). Few resources are available to teachers to identify sources of text complexity easily beyond vocabulary and sentence length, especially in the form of commercial curricula to connect engagement with difficult topics in the public domain to learning, and specifically reading, in the disciplines. Thus, we have sought to articulate the needed knowledge base to design this kind of instruction to support local communities of teachers in doing this difficult work. We have sought to design illustrative units that are explicit about the joint literacy and civic demands being integrated.

We conclude by arguing that schools need to be organized as professional learning communities. The task of designing the kind of instruction we have described should not land solely on the shoulders of individual teachers. This is particularly important because the kind of instruction and instructional units connecting deep literacy learning with civic reasoning and discourse is not typically found in the commercial resources available to teachers. As discussed in this series' social studies/history report, there are several web-based resources for teaching history and social studies topics, but these sites typically do not have detailed information about preparing students to read primary and secondary sources. There are few, if any, such resources available freely online or in commercial curricula in the other academic disciplines. Lesson Study (Lewis et al., 2006) in Japan, including efforts to bring this practice to scale in the United States, and the National Writing Project or Bread Loaf Teacher Network are examples of professional learning communities of teachers.

Across disciplines, literacy in all its components is a foundational skill needed to gather data to inform our decision making across the myriad complex challenges with which we wrestle in the public domain.

Appendix A

CHALLENGES IN THE TEACHING OF READING COMPREHENSION

In this appendix, we describe in more detail what is entailed in teaching reading comprehension across the grades and content areas as well as its complex challenges. We include this discussion because learning intricate literacy skills must be the cornerstone for instruction that in tandem incorporates civic reasoning and discourse. We also include the topic of how to structure rich discussion in classrooms that embody the features of civic reasoning and discourse we have documented in this report.

How to Teach Comprehension

While we have described the conditions that need to be in place to support students in developing the knowledge and dispositions required for civic reasoning and discourse, it is important to address the literacy demands of interrogating texts that invite wrestling with complexities we face in our civic problem-solving.

We must teach students how to comprehend. Reading comprehension is a form of ill-structured problem-solving (Hatano & Inagaki, 1986) because the reader may not know the problems the text will present ahead of time, and a text may pose very different problems of comprehension when reading section by section. Teaching students how to comprehend is complex because there are few, if any, commercial curricula that teach students how to comprehend. More often than not, such curricula introduce texts and ask students to provide outcomes of comprehension. Some strategies commonly referenced may be useful as structures but do not provide heuristic guidance. For example, "KWL" (i.e., What do I know, what do I want to know, and what have I learned?) provides no guidance about what the reader can expect to look for by virtue of the genre and structure of a text. Use of graphic organizers is also common, but typically teachers give students a graphic organizer to guide their attempts to infer relationships among propositions in a given text. But the issue is how students learn to know what features of a text suggest certain relationships among ideas. These strategies might include looking for words that denote relationships (if–then, when, because, etc.), but students will also meet texts or sections of texts in which such linguistic indicators are not present.

We offer below guidelines for heuristics students can learn to guide their comprehension processes and build their independence as readers. Such attention to heuristics also builds self-efficacy and growth mindset, both important contributors to impactful civic reasoning and discourse. It should be noted that all of these heuristic skills can be taught across the K–12 grade span. Although the complexity of the texts will shift across grades, the foundational comprehension skills remain overall the same. This stands in contrast to grade-level comprehension strategies in the Common Core English language arts standards for reading.

Literature

In our everyday life, we engage with different kinds of narratives—such as oral storytelling and stories on television and in the movies—in which we make predictions about what to expect based on our intuitive knowledge of genres. We know the differences in what to expect when we view science fiction (e.g., *Star Wars*), mysteries (e.g., *Murder on the Orient Express*), and westerns (e.g., *Dances With Wolves*). Our knowledge of these genres leads us to predict what kind of people we will meet and in what kinds of actions they will engage. For literature, narrative genre features include types of characters, types of plots, and archetypal themes (Lee, 2011; Lee, Goldman, et al., 2016; Smagorinsky & Gevinson, 1989).

A design challenge is in thinking through how to put text sets together, because students need repeated opportunities to practice particular interpretive skills. These skills include both what Hillocks and Ludlow (1984) call author generalizations (e.g., questions about themes) and structural generalizations (e.g., questions about how authors use language and structure to convey ideas). Finding common problems across literary narratives around both themes and rhetorical structures is possible but not typically found in commercial curricula. These concerns about kinds of characters, kinds of stories, rhetorical moves, and themes apply as problems from Pre-K through 12th grade. Rhetorical moves include problems of figuration—satire, irony, and symbolism—and problems of point of view—unreliable narrators and multiple narrators. A comprehensive resource for identifying broad literary heuristics is the book *Before Reading* by Peter Rabinowitz (1987) (see Box C).

C

Before Reading by Peter Rabinowitz (1987)

Rabinowitz identifies what he calls "rules of notice", "rules of signification", "rules of configuration", and "rules of coherence":

Rules of notice	Features of text used by authors to draw our attention
Rules of signification	The knowledge on which we draw as readers to attribute significance to what we notice
Rules of configuration	The partial sensemaking we attempt as we are reading
Rules of coherence	How we construct a sense of the whole after reading

The rules of notice have been taken up widely to guide students in being alert as they read to identify systemic ways in which literary authors seek to draw our attention. Rules of notice include beginnings, endings, and titles; repetition and rich description; and ruptures and tensions. Box D includes a more detailed discussion of rules of notice. These heuristics can enhance readers' understanding of characters and plot and, equally important, lead readers to pause and take stock of ways that authors guide them to issues of symbolism, satire, irony, and other figurative moves.

D

Extended Rules of Notice

Privileged Positions

1. Details providing insights into characters' motivations and goals
    - Explicit attributions regarding characters' actions, goal states, or consequences of actions made by the narrator
2. Patterns
    - Related actions, images, goal states, or consequences that are repeated
    - Abundance of details
    - Understatement of details
    - Disruptions or ruptures from the expected
    - Oppositions
3. Shifts in time, place, goals, or internal states of characters
4. Point of view
    - Who is speaking?
    - What point of view on action or character is conveyed?
    - Is the narrator reliable?
    - Are there multiple narrators?
5. Events
    - Sequence
    - Causal or logical links
        - Rising action (sequences leading reader to certain expectations)
        - Climax (high point where important shift occurs that points toward conclusion)
        - Falling action or denouement
        - Coda—so what?
6. Judgments—using criteria to evaluate how the narrative fulfills or conflicts with expectations
    - Common themes
    - Archetypal themes
    - Character types
    - Plot configurations—expectations around kinds of events, kinds of people, and possible codas
7. Criteria
    - Intertextual
    - Literary theory
    - Personal beliefs and commitments

Adapted From Booth (1983); Lee (2007); Rabinowitz (1987); Rabinowitz & Smith (1998)

The resources for identifying heuristics for recognizing these features of literary texts are typically found in the work of literary criticism. It is important that these heuristics are used in children's literature as well as, for example, children's cartoons and other media. Box E identifies several general heuristics or rules of notice for identifying literary problems central to the discipline.

E

Heuristics for Identifying Literary Problems

Symbolism	• Rich detail, more than needed to make the point • Detail that literally cannot be true
Unreliable narrators (Booth, 1983; Smith, 1991)	• Narrator's self-interest • Sufficiently experienced • Too emotional • Insufficiently knowledgeable • Inconsistency between actions and words

In her research on cultural modeling, Lee (2001, 2007) documented how these literary problems are part of everyday narratives (e.g., oral storytelling, speech genres such as signifying in African American English, stories on television and in the movies, music lyrics). This is in part because narrative sensemaking is a routine process of meaning-making for humans. In cultural modeling, teachers work to understand the range of everyday practices in which their students engage—some of which will be specific to particular cultural communities and others that will be common to generation and popular culture—for the purposes of identifying points of convergence between everyday sensemaking and literary reasoning. These popular/cultural texts (broadly defined) then become the focus of early instruction, designing activities that support students in making public and explicit, through metacognitive reflections, the intuitive strategies they use in order to recruit what are now explicit strategies to the interpretation of literary texts.

Based on the research of Smith and Hillocks (1988), a general strategy for helping students interrogate themes in literary texts is to create activities that engage them in articulating criteria for judging themes and for identifying character types. *Explorations* (Smagorinsky et al., 1987) offers examples of questionnaires, surveys, and scenarios that invite students to draw on their everyday knowledge and experiences to identify criteria for evaluating questions such as "what makes a good parent" in anticipation of reading *To Kill A Mockingbird*, or how to determine courageous action and different kinds of courageous action in preparing to read literary narratives involving themes of courage.

Informational Texts

There are generic strategies we can teach to help students learn how to tackle informational texts, including the following:

- Turn titles and headings into questions that drive what the reader seeks to answer from reading.
- Where explicit, identify topic sentences, transition words, and concluding sentences.

- Look for language that explicitly signals logical relations among ideas (e.g., cause–effect, problem–solution, sequence, if–then relationships).
- Seek to summarize as you read.
- Continue to test hypotheses as you read (e.g., As you read, does the information continue to support what you think is being communicated?).
- De-construct long, complicated sentences and follow anaphora (i.e., words that refer back to other words—pronouns, "that," and synonyms).

Routinely summarizing orally and in writing, annotating, and using graphic organizers are meaningful practices for students to support their comprehension of informational texts. Box F provides details on reading informational texts in social studies and history..

F

Informational Texts in Social Studies and History

Beyond textbooks, standards in social studies and history argue that students should read primary, secondary, and tertiary texts. Primary texts are ones that are created during the historical moment in which the topic unfolded. These can include legal documents, government reports, newspapers and magazines, diaries, and letters. Secondary texts include texts that are written about a historical moment or issue of historical significance but not during the period of enactment. Tertiary texts are written to synthesize information regarding events of the historical past, with textbooks being the most common tertiary and indeed the most common text used in the teaching of social studies and history. Texts in social studies and history also include maps, data displays, photographs, and even art. There is research on heuristics for analyzing such visual displays (see, e.g., Levin & Mayer, 1993; Mayer, 1980, 1989a, 1989b). Whether via print texts, digital texts, or visual texts, historians expect readers to examine sources for the following:

- Sourcing—What do we know about the author and any self-interests the author might have around the issue?
- Contextualization—What do we know about the contexts under which the text was composed and shared with audiences?
- Corroboration—What do we know about corroboration for claims made within the broader historical record?

These questions are intended as heuristics for interrogating the validity of claims made in the document and for understanding the point of view embedded in the document.

The heuristics identified above for examining generic informational texts also apply to primary and secondary texts in history. To the extent that a primary or secondary text in history contains complex syntax, highly technical language, or archaic language, there is research guiding how teachers can adapt such texts to make them more accessible to struggling readers while maintaining accuracy of content (Wineburg & Martin, 2009). At the same time, each specialized genre has features that an expert can notice to guide the reader's expectations about the functions of the text.

Guided Reading as Instructional Strategy

Even struggling readers can be guided to engage in robust comprehension with complex texts, whether literary or informational, including specialized disciplinary genres in history, social studies, and civics. First, teachers need to analyze sources of complexity in texts.[5] Then, the task is to provide supports for students to enable them to tackle these challenges. Some involve preparation before reading, such as anticipating prior knowledge that the text presumes the reader brings and that is not explicitly addressed in the text. Building relevant background knowledge that is not text dependent can be useful.

Analyzing what students need to do and learn in small chunks of texts replicates the in-process meaning-making work we do as expert readers. This can be addressed through the creation of reading guides, which can articulate the questions that focus students' attention on what they are reading to find out. Posing in-text questions is different from posing questions that ask for outcomes of understanding after having read a whole text. To the extent that the wording of questions can capture concepts anwwips, such guided questions can socialize modes of reasoning critical to understanding. Illustrations of how to organize such in-reading supports can be found on the website that demonstrates the features of the tool Sensemaking in the Disciplines, which supports close reading in the disciplines. This tool was developed by Lee and Levine et al. (2016) as part of Project READi, supported by the Institute of Education Sciences as part of its broader Reading for Understanding project.

How to Structure Classroom Discussion

Discussion is essential to civic reasoning and discourse. Classrooms that follow the traditional "IRE" (i.e., teacher initiates the question, teacher identifies who will respond, and teacher evaluates response) (Mehan, 1979) do not invite the kind of robust debate that is necessary for civic reasoning and discourse. Achieving that level of discourse means structuring classrooms so that students take the lead and build on one another's ideas, with equitable distribution of talk across students. There are multiple models that provide guidance for structuring and coordinating such discussions, such as Socratic seminars, accountable talk, making thinking visible, and others (see Box G). These models offer extensive resources for designing classroom discourse, and several texts and online resources can serve as useful guides.

All of these models have long histories and an abundance of empirical research to support their effectiveness. The foundational ideas are to organize instruction that supports students in analyzing data through an array of resources in order to extrapolate information to support argumentation, in which students make claims, provide evidence to support their claims, and present the reasoning why their evidence should be believed. In rich student-led discussions, students initiate ideas, listen to one another with respect, and respond to one another with reasoning, and the distribution of talk is equitable across the group. Such talk should also require that students create visual representations of their thinking, individually and as groups, so that the class and teacher can follow the logic of reasoning across time. These features of discussion model what we have argued is necessary for rich and democratic civic reasoning and discourse—not talk that is violent and negative in its tenor, not talk in which participants do not listen to one another, and not talk that is based purely on opinion and evidence that can be interrogated by others.

[5] Tables B-1 and B-2 in Appendix B, developed by Carol Lee as part of Project READi, identify features of texts that can be sources of challenge. Teachers can use these features in assessing the demands of informational and literary texts they assign.

G

Models for Structuring Robust Classroom Discourse

Socratic Seminars

Socratic Seminars Strategy Guide by NCTE
Socratic Seminars: Building a Culture of Student-Led Discussion by Edutopia
Socratic Seminar Teaching Strategy by Facing History & Ourselves
Quality Talk About Text: Discussion Practices for Talking and Thinking About Text (Wilkinson & Bourdage, 2022)

Accountable Talk

Accountable Talk Sourcebook: For Classroom Conversation That Works (Michaels et al., 2013)
Accountable Talk resources

Making Thinking Visible

Making Thinking Visible (Ritchhart & Perkins, 2008)
Making Thinking Visible: How to Promote Engagement, Understanding, and Independence for All Learners (Ritchhart et al., 2011)

Appendix B

SOURCES OF TEXT COMPLEXITY

Table B-1 **Sources of Text Complexity for Literary Texts**

Generic
Length
Syntax
Coherence markers
Vocabulary
Key Concepts
Theme
Historical Context
Prior knowledge assumed by author
Plot Structure • Linear/Converted • Causal links explicit/implicit • Number of action events
Characterization • Character type(s) • Number of main characters • Function of minor characters • Complexity of relationships • Amount of dialogue and/or character description
Psychological complexity • Unidimensional • Multidimensional
Stable or changing character(s)
Rhetorical and Pragmatic Challenges
Key Interpretive Problem(s)
Rules of Notice for the Interpretive Problem

Note. Provided by Carol Lee.

Table B-2 **Sources of Text Complexity for Informational Texts**

Sources of complexity	Dimensions to consider
Overall readability	• Lexile measures
Length	• Longer texts likely introduce multiple, compounding comprehension challenges
Sentence structure/syntax	• Load of simple, compound, complex, compound-complex
Vocabulary	• Tier 1, 2, 3 • Roots • Affixes • Specialized or disciplinary • Figurative
Markers of cohesion	• Role of pronouns • Connectors • Vocabulary replicating major ideas or characters • Role of synonyms
Text structure	• Single • Multiple • Markers explicit • Markers to be inferred • Identify text structure(s) • Graphic displays • Literature: Rules of notice
Density of propositions/ideas	• # Main ideas • # Sub claims • # Details to support main ideas • # Details to support sub claims • Repetitions vs single mentions or references that are important to the overall argument
Conceptual load	• To what extent are concepts made explicit vs needing to be inferred
Prior knowledge assumed/required	• Students have the required prior knowledge • Prior knowledge must be built before reading

Note. Provided by Carol Lee.

Appendix C

PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING ARGUMENTATION

Adapted from Hillocks (2010, 2011)

In the end, the task students will be asked to carry out in most of the exemplars offered in this report is to take a student-driven position on a complex question in the civic domain and to argue that position based on evidence.

Our design work in teaching argumentation draws largely from the work of Stephen Toulmin and George Hillocks. Toulmin explains that to be convincing, it is necessary but not sufficient to provide evidence for claims. We must be able to convince others that they should accept our evidence. We examine evidence based on warrants and backing. Warrants provide the reason that evidence should be believed. Warrants are often generally accepted beliefs or practices. For example, when watching crime shows on television, what guides the detective in looking at evidence is an appeal to a general sense of logic of what might lead to a particular action or why a piece of evidence leads to certain hunches about what happened. Backing is the reason we should believe the warrants. Backing may be based on evidence of the reliability of data, a set of moral values that are shared, or norms for sensemaking that are specific to particular communities of practice. For example, if you try to convince someone that you won this hand of bridge, but the evidence you provide is not consistent with the rules of bridge, that person is not likely to accept the argument. Warrants are conceptually connected to our discussion earlier of establishing criteria for making judgments. This is important because more often than not our debates are not about facts but about judgments. We want to socialize students to reject arguments, certainly in the public domain, that are not based on facts. For example, arguments that the Holocaust of the Second World War did not happen or that children were not murdered at Sandy Hook Elementary School must be rejected. This is no small matter in preparing our young people to engage in civic reasoning and discourse; right now, we have many heated political arguments about events or actions that simply are false. Students must learn to reject such positioning. In the study of history—at this moment hotly being contested in public education—it is entirely possible to have very different interpretations of events: Should Confederate monuments be allowed to stand in public spaces? What actions should be taken (or not taken) by municipal units, corporations, or universities that participated in the system of human slavery in the United States or in relationships with Indigenous communities? However, to argue that such events did not occur (e.g., the war between the states was not a "civil war" but a war of "northern aggression") cannot stand if we are to engage in civic reasoning and discourse that is rational.

George Hillocks has designed a research-based framework for teaching argumentation. He identifies three kinds of arguments, each successively more complex, that students need to learn: arguments of fact, arguments of judgment, and arguments of policy. In his book *Teaching Argument Writing* (2011), he provides concrete activities to support students in learning to engage in each kind of argumentation. For example, he provides a picture called "Slip or Trip," in which we see a man who is lying down on the floor at the bottom of the stairs and his wife who has just returned from a night out on the town. Students are asked to play the roles of detectives to figure out whether the man slipped and fell by accident or if there is evidence to suggest that he may have been pushed. Students have fun identifying specific details from the picture along with what are essentially warrants about why those particular details are evidence of murder or of an accident. The comic series called *Crime and Puzzlement* (see, e.g., Treat & Bornstein, 1991) is filled with similar visual scenarios.

According to Hillocks, arguments of judgment require establishing criteria to apply in data, to provide the rationale for the judgment. Hillocks, along with colleagues who are his former students, developed a design framework for helping students establish such criteria. For example, in his book

Teaching Argument Writing, Hillocks offers a historical picture of a late 18th century etching by John Gillray of the Prince of Wales, who would become King George IV of England. Students are asked the following questions: (1) What details in the picture indicate that the Prince is a voluptuary? (2) What details does Gillray use to portray the Prince as a voluptuary? (3) If Gillray is right, is this man fit to be king? Hillocks's next step has been to ask students, "What characteristics are necessary or important in a good king?" A voluptuary is defined as a person devoted to luxury and sensual pleasure. The logic of this inquiry entails for Question 1 arguments of fact. Question 2 entails questions of judgment (e.g., applying the criteria for what constitutes the actions and desires of a voluptuary). Question 3 entails questions of policy, namely identifying criteria for determining whether a person has the characteristics students determine a king should have and whether this Prince of Wales meets those policy criteria. And while this exemplar may seem far removed from students' experiences, Hillocks's work in real urban classrooms demonstrated how seventh grade urban students were able to engage actively in this analysis.

In other designs, Hillocks and colleagues offer scenarios where students are asked to make judgments and the criteria lead to articulating categories of a construct. In one example, they offer a scenario of a burning building to examine the concept of courageous action. In one case, an ordinary person walks past the building and goes in on his own to save people in the building. In the second case, the fire department comes to the fire, and the firemen go in to save the people. The scenarios are about defining courageous action—that is, making a judgment about whether a particular action exemplifies a conception of courage. Students inevitably conclude that while both actions involve courage, they are not the same. The fireman is trained to go into danger while the everyday person is not. Thus, students conclude criteria for two categories of courageous action to inform their judgments. In *Explorations*, Smagorinsky et al. (1987) offer multiple illustrations of engaging activities that help students to develop criteria for judgments about themes and character types in literature.

Hillocks then goes on in *Teaching Argument Writing* to provide teaching examples of preparing students to develop arguments of policy. These activities are typically rooted in students gathering data that are specific to their school, for an issue about which they wish to make a recommendation. The exemplar unit in this report on dress codes is an illustration of teaching students to engage in arguments of policy, informed by Hillocks's model. Students are then supported in evaluating the data they collect in order to make a judgment—based on evidence and criteria—of what to do. In many cases, the challenges with which we wrestle and for which we seek to support students in wrestling are arguments of policy (e.g., what to do).

We should note that this research on teaching argumentation is primarily aimed at middle and high school students. We have not taken this formal approach to teaching argumentation in the primary grades. However, in Appendix D, we offer an example of a primary grade unit developed by Nell Duke

Appendix D

PROJECT-BASED UNITS FOR PRIMARY-GRADE LEVEL ON POLICY

Project PLACE (Project-approach to Literacy and Civic Engagement) is a project-based approach to literacy and civic engagement developed for second-grade students. Duke and colleagues developed these units in the areas of history, geography, and civics and government. Each unit integrates literacy instruction in projects that engage children in civic reasoning and engagement. For example, the children explore questions about a public good that can be personally meaningful to them: access to a public park. They learn rudimentary facts about what government structures are authorized to make decisions around park resources and uses. They learn they can be agents of change by actively investigating the problem and advocating for their goals. They are also engaged in important literacy work—reading texts, writing for others, and learning vocabulary and language practices necessary for their advocacy work.

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