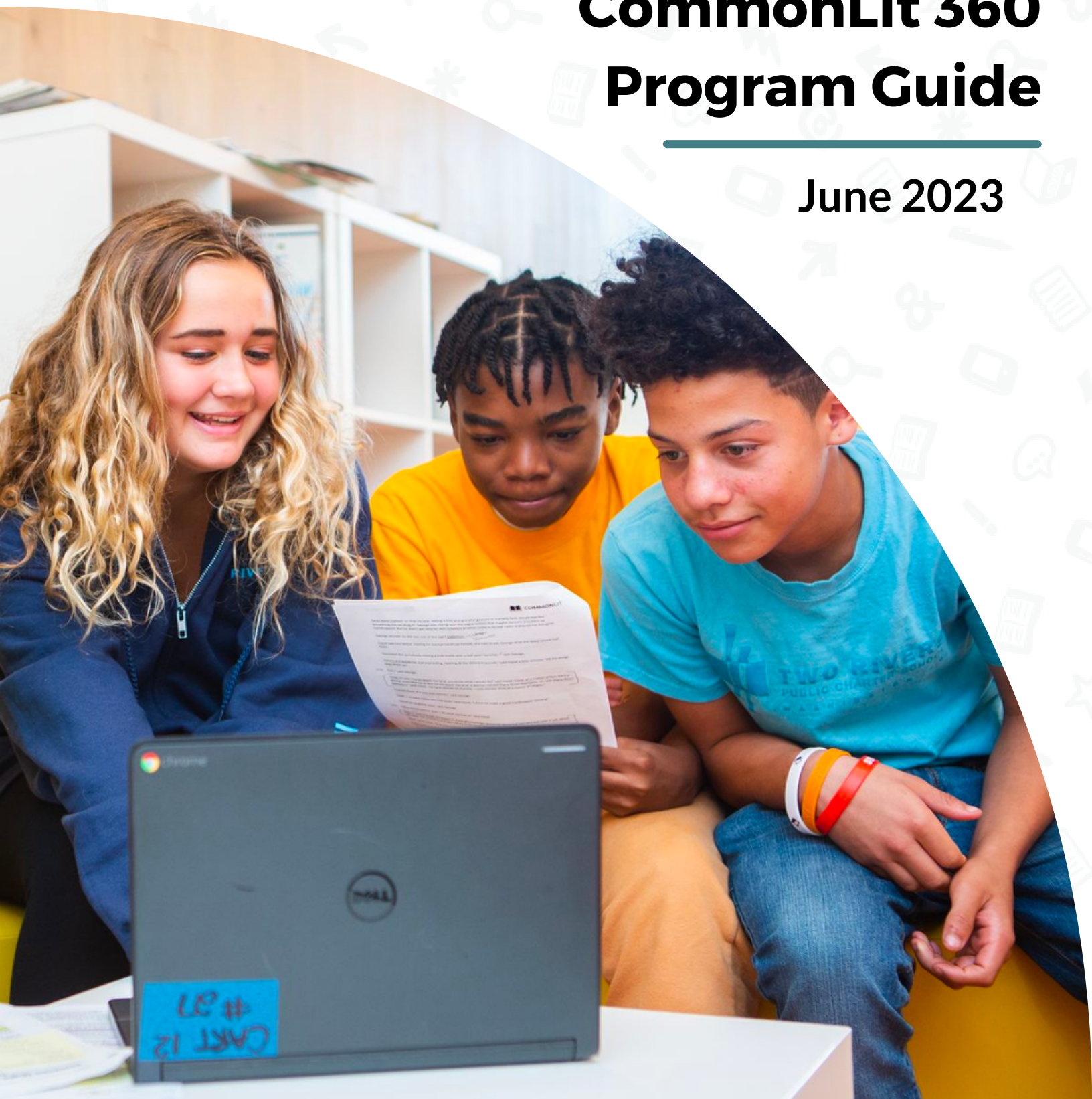




# CommonLit 360 Program Guide

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June 2023



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## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to CommonLit 360, a full-year secondary English Language Arts curriculum designed to support student growth in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Our curriculum is grounded in research-based practices and is built around the idea that students learn best when they are engaged in meaningful, relevant, and challenging work. By providing educators with rigorous content and instructional support, CommonLit 360 enables students to reach their full potential.

The CommonLit 360 curriculum includes CommonLit 360 for Middle School (grades 6-8) and CommonLit 360 for High School (grades 9-12; under development).<sup>1</sup> This program guide provides a detailed overview of how to use CommonLit 360's tools and resources effectively, enabling you to support your students in strengthening their literacy skills.

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<sup>1</sup> CommonLit 360 for High School (Grades 9-12) is under development. Stay tuned for new 11-12th grade units and revised 9-10th grade units releasing 2023-2024!

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The principles that follow represent CommonLit's foundational beliefs about teaching and learning, and serve as the basis for the design and implementation of our curriculum. Our team of experienced educators have carefully developed CommonLit 360 to align with these guiding principles, ensuring that each unit and lesson is designed to support student growth and success.

### **Students can engage with and learn rigorous, grade-level content**

All students are capable of achieving success with grade-level learning. As such, it is essential that all students access and engage with grade-level texts and learning activities. With high expectations and appropriate support, all students can develop their academic language and literacy to grade-level proficiency. By providing access to high-quality grade-level content, teachers can empower students to challenge themselves, fostering resilience and a growth mindset that will serve them throughout their academic journey and beyond.

### **Teachers drive student outcomes**

Teachers play a vital role in fueling their students' academic development. As educators, mentors, advocates, and role models, they wield immense influence in shaping student success. As needs vary from classroom to classroom and student to student, teachers are entrusted to make decisions about the content and instruction that is best suited for their own students. Meaningfully supporting their students requires sufficient time and capacity of teachers. Providing teachers with robust, grade-level instructional materials and resources to develop and enhance their own pedagogical practices maximizes their ability to meet the diverse needs of the students in their classrooms.

### **Deep engagement fosters deep learning**

Deep learning arises when students are genuinely engaged with content that matters to them. Emphasizing depth over breadth of knowledge helps students create a strong, conceptually-rich foundation in a given discipline, while encouraging critical thinking and the use of skills pertinent to that field. Encouraging student agency within their own learning not only fosters deeper engagement but also leads to more meaningful, long-lasting understanding. A curriculum that resonates with students can ignite their curiosity and inspire them to delve deeper into the topics and themes they explore.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

### **Learning is fundamentally social**

Learning is an inherently social process where students acquire knowledge and skills through interaction, collaboration, and observation. To promote engagement and academic success, it is crucial to cultivate a positive classroom climate that nurtures strong relationships among students and teachers. This is achieved by incorporating cooperative and peer-assisted learning strategies into the English Language Arts classroom to develop academic abilities and social skills. All English Language Arts students should engage in academic discourse and meaningful interactions with others, building conceptual understanding and language competence in tandem.



## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

### **CommonLit 360:**

#### **Develops effective reading, writing, speaking, listening, and critical thinking habits**

The CommonLit 360 curriculum emphasizes a student-focused and student-led exploration of thought-provoking texts and topics across a wide variety of units. By engaging students in effective habits of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and critical thinking, the curriculum cultivates self-reliance and independent learning. Throughout the curriculum, students engage in significant collaboration and reflection, developing the skills necessary to analyze complex ideas and communicate their understanding effectively. Integrating these skills further enhances students' understanding, as success in one domain often leads to success in others. The curriculum's structure and content are designed to foster the development of lifelong learning habits that students can carry with them beyond the classroom.

#### **Promotes a learning environment centered on cooperation, peer interaction, and strong communication**

The CommonLit 360 curriculum encourages a learning environment that emphasizes cooperation, peer interaction, and the expression of diverse perspectives. Students participate in cooperative tasks, working together to analyze sources and engaging in authentic research and argumentation to refine their viewpoints. This collaborative approach to learning helps students develop critical interpersonal skills, fostering a sense of community within the classroom and promoting a deeper understanding of each unit's content.

#### **Fosters authentic, real-world connections**

The CommonLit 360 curriculum fosters genuine, real-world connections, enabling students to build rich, conceptual knowledge of the world around them and apply their learning in substantial, practical ways. By incorporating diverse texts, multimedia resources, and project-focused learning opportunities, CommonLit 360 helps students make meaningful connections between their lives and the content they are studying. This approach prepares students for success beyond the classroom, empowering them to navigate the complexities of the modern world with confidence and critical thinking skills.

#### **Supports learners with diverse needs**

The CommonLit 360 curriculum is specifically designed to best serve students who are within two years of grade-level proficiency and ready to comprehend and analyze grade-level texts, write clear and well-organized work, listen attentively, and speak effectively according to grade-level standards. To ensure inclusivity and access for diverse learners, the curriculum includes resources for teachers

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

to support students who may struggle to engage with grade-level content and skills. Efficient scaffolding and supports provide resources necessary to foster an inclusive learning environment that values every student's unique level of readiness.

### **Empowers teachers to concentrate on impactful instruction through streamlined program design**

The CommonLit 360 curriculum integrates the core pillars of secondary English Language Arts education — reading, writing, listening, and speaking — throughout all academic activities. With a focus on easy-to-follow, streamlined tasks, CommonLit 360 empowers educators to confidently guide their students towards a deeper mastery of English Language Arts within a rich learning environment. Teachers use data from comprehension checks, formative assessments, and culminating tasks to guide timely and impactful instruction, adapting their approach to best meet student needs through the use of strategic supports, supplemental resources, and student choice.

### **Provides flexible implementation for local communities**

The CommonLit 360 curriculum is designed to be adaptable to the specific needs and preferences of local communities: it allows teachers to customize instruction to meet the unique characteristics of the community, to include texts and materials that are relevant to student communities (via choice boards, supplemental texts, and independent reading opportunities), to use different and appropriate teaching methodologies, to incorporate timely, local resources, and to adjust the pacing and rigor of instruction to meet student needs. Teachers are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the specific needs of their students and local communities and use their pedagogical expertise to adapt the curriculum accordingly.

### **Ensures efficacy**

CommonLit is committed to delivering a curriculum that supports student learning through high-quality, authentic materials and rigorous instruction. To ensure that our approach is effective, we work closely with partners and researchers to conduct ongoing efficacy studies and make necessary revisions based on the results. Our dedication to efficacy is reflected in our track record of success, which you can read about in [our latest report](#).



## OVERALL PROGRAM DESIGN

Each grade in the CommonLit 360 curriculum includes at least one thematic unit, one novel or drama unit, one research unit and one argumentative writing unit.

All essential lessons within the unit build toward the unit's culminating task. Each unit includes some optional lessons and activities that teachers may use to supplement core instruction. Optional lessons may include context-building, prerequisite skills some students may not have, additional scaffolding, or opportunities for extension.

Lessons are designed to span 45-90 minutes of instruction. Knowing that student needs may vary widely, teachers are best suited to make their own pacing decisions.

### Scope and Sequence

The CommonLit 360 curriculum is organized into a coherent and logical scope and sequence, ensuring that each grade level builds upon prior knowledge and skills. The curriculum is divided into six units per year, with each unit focusing on a specific topic or theme relevant to students' lives and experiences.

#### CommonLit 360 for Middle School (grades 6-8)

	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6
6th	<b>Characters Who Change and Grow</b> <i>Thematic</i>	<b>The Recipe for Success</b> <i>Nonfiction</i>	<b><i>The Giver</i> By Lois Lowry</b> <i>Novel</i>	<b>Our Changing Oceans</b> <i>Research Writing</i>	<b>The Forces that Shape Us</b> <i>Thematic</i>	<b>The Power of Play</b> <i>Argumentative Writing</i>
7th	<b>Community and Belonging</b> <i>Thematic</i>	<b>Adolescence</b> <i>Thematic</i>	<b><i>Brown Girl Dreaming</i> By Jacqueline Woodson</b> <i>Novel</i>	<b>Social Media: Risks and Rewards</b> <i>Research Writing</i>	<b>Influential Voices</b> <i>Thematic</i>	<b>School Electives: Which One Matters Most?</b> <i>Argumentative Writing</i>
8th	<b>The Art of Suspense</b> <i>Thematic</i>	<b>Conveying Courage</b> <i>Thematic</i>	<b><i>Twelve Angry Men</i> By Reginald Rose</b> <i>Drama</i>	<b>Contact Sports: Worth the Risk?</b> <i>Research Writing</i>	<b>Not that Different</b> <i>Thematic</i>	<b>The Debate Over School Start Time</b> <i>Argumentative Writing</i>

# OVERALL PROGRAM DESIGN

CommonLit 360 for High School (grades 9-12)

	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6
9th	<b>Following the Crowd</b>  <i>Thematic</i>	<b>People and the Environment</b>  <i>Thematic</i>	<b><i>Animal Farm</i> by George Orwell</b>  <i>Novel</i>	<b>The Science of Branding: Why We Buy</b>  <i>Research Writing</i>	<b>Parents and Children</b>  <i>Thematic</i>	<b>Graffiti - Art or Crime?</b>  <i>Argumentative Writing</i>
10th	<b>Coming of Age</b>  <i>Thematic</i>	<b>Science Fiction and Social Commentary</b>  <i>Thematic</i>	<b><i>Things Fall Apart</i> by Chinua Achebe</b>  <i>Novel</i>	<b>The Fashion Industry: Past to Present</b>  <i>Research Writing</i>	<b>War Stories</b>  <i>Thematic</i>	<b>Free Speech and Social Media</b>  <i>Argumentative Writing</i>
11th	<b><i>The Great Gatsby</i> by F. Scott Fitzgerald</b>  <i>Novel</i>	<b><i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> by Zora Neale Hurston</b>  <i>Novel</i>	<b>The Social Contract</b>  <i>Thematic</i>	Under Development		
12th	<b>Writing Your Story: Memoir and Application Essays</b>  <i>Thematic</i>	<b><i>Frankenstein</i> by Mary Shelley</b>  <i>Novel</i>	<b><i>Othello</i> by William Shakespeare</b>  <i>Drama</i>	Under Development		

# Units

## Unit structure

CommonLit 360 uses a backwards design approach to instruction, which involves determining unit learning outcomes and identifying the assessments that will measure them before planning instruction that supports students in achieving the learning outcomes.

In each unit, students examine a series of texts that focus on a central theme or topic. Throughout the unit, lessons and activities support students in developing a core understanding of the knowledge and skills presented. At the end of each unit, students complete a culminating task which serves as the unit's summative assessment.

## Culminating Tasks

To measure student understanding, each unit culminates in a task that assesses student understanding of core unit knowledge and skills. Throughout the unit, students engage in the writing process to refine this task so that they have a published product by the end of the unit.

## Lessons

Every lesson is designed around the unit's learning outcomes and aims to equip students with the skills necessary for successfully accomplishing the culminating task. In each lesson, students interact with one or more texts or pieces of essential unit content to develop the knowledge and skills required for success on the culminating task.

Lessons are categorized by type: Reading, Writing, Discussion, Related Media Exploration, Vocabulary and Grammar. In every lesson, students engage in reading, writing, and speaking activities related to their understanding and analysis of the unit texts and content, ensuring a comprehensive integration of English Language Arts skills.

Each lesson culminates in a formative assessment, where students express their learning through writing, speaking, and/or a multiple choice assessment. Teachers use student responses to monitor student progress toward their learning goals.

PDF materials of lessons include a student copy and a teacher copy. Each teacher copy of a lesson starts with a cover page that offers a description of the lesson, its objectives, and its components. Additionally, the cover page includes information on required materials and the facilitation needed for successful implementation.

# Units

## Unit Types

CommonLit 360 units fall into four categories:

- **Thematic Units:** These units feature an assortment of short texts that share a common theme or topic. By exploring various genres and styles, students gain exposure to different perspectives and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.
- **Novel Units:** In these units, a novel serves as the anchor text, and students engage with additional shorter texts to enrich their understanding of the novel's content. This approach enables students to delve into the complexities of the novel, make connections between texts, and explore related themes or issues.
- **Research Writing Units:** Students are tasked with researching a specific topic by reading a curated collection of topically-related texts. They synthesize information and present their findings to an authentic audience beyond students' teachers or classmates, which helps them develop research, critical thinking, and effective communication skills.
- **Argumentative Writing Units:** In these units, students read a series of texts related to an engaging, debatable issue. They use this information to form a stance on the issue and create a well-reasoned argument to present to an authentic audience. This process encourages critical analysis, persuasive writing, and the ability to defend one's viewpoint with evidence.

## Assessments

CommonLit 360 assists teachers in utilizing assessments to accurately gauge student learning and make informed instructional decisions. Each unit includes assessments in the form of culminating unit tasks, formative assessments, and regular comprehension checks.

### Culminating Tasks

Culminating tasks are included in each unit as the final assessment. Each task draws from the lessons students have completed throughout the unit, allowing students to apply their learning to demonstrate the skills and knowledge they have gained. Culminating tasks include student choice and autonomy, as students determine the focus and development of their work.

For example, the culminating task for 8th grade unit 4: Contact Sports — Worth the Risk? asks students to create an advertisement and present a short “pitch” to their classmates that argues whether or not playing contact sports is valuable despite the health risks. Students have the option to choose their side and design an advertisement in the medium of their choice. They collaborate with classmates to ensure their design and pitch appropriately address their audience and claims before presenting it to the class.

Culminating tasks may demonstrate student learning and proficiency through a variety of formats (writing, speaking, presentations, research, or a combination of modes) and collaboration structures, such as in small groups or pairs. Written tasks can include literary analysis, argumentative writing, or expository writing, and student presentations.

Teachers implementing the culminating tasks have multiple touch points with students throughout each unit to understand their comprehension of the texts and topics, and their skill proficiency (e.g. formative assessments, graphic organizers, task outlines, and multiple drafts).

Culminating tasks are assessed using the associated rubric, which allows teachers and students to track and understand how students are performing in relation to the focus standards in the unit. Teachers use the data collected from the culminating task to evaluate students' overall understanding of unit knowledge and skills, monitor student progress towards learning goals, provide valuable feedback to students, and plan subsequent instruction.

Additional optional tasks are included in most units for the purpose of providing local sites the opportunity to extend student learning through additional activities. These tasks should not be used in place of unit culminating tasks.

# Assessments

## Rubrics

Using rubrics in the evaluation process helps to ensure that assessments are consistent, objective, and transparent. Rubrics enable teachers to provide constructive feedback that helps students recognize their strengths, identify areas for improvement, and set goals for future growth.

In the CommonLit 360 curriculum, each unit's culminating task is accompanied by a rubric that provides students with a score and descriptors explaining the academic qualities demonstrated in their performance task. The rubrics take into account students' comprehension of texts and their performance on the skills and tasks practiced in the unit.

The following rubric types are present in the CommonLit 360 curriculum:

- Writing: informative, argumentative, narrative, literary analysis
- Listening and speaking
- Presentation

## Formative Assessments

Formative assessments are a powerful tool in English Language Arts instruction, with a range of benefits for both students and teachers. Regularly monitoring student progress through multiple data points across different writing skills and forms of writing can help teachers build a complete picture of student progress and adapt instruction as necessary.

CommonLit 360 incorporates opportunities for students to independently demonstrate their learning at the end of each lesson through in-class Independent Practice activities (these are similar to “exit tickets” teachers use in daily classwork). These activities require students to answer a short written response question, an application question, and/or multiple-choice assessment questions. Teachers are able to monitor students' comprehension, analysis, and skill building through frequent review of these formative assessments, allowing them to adjust their instructional practices and improve student learning outcomes.

## Comprehension Checks

Throughout the course of each CommonLit 360 reading lesson, students have the opportunity to answer during reading questions, respond to annotation tasks, and capture and synthesize information in note taking graphic organizers.



## Assessments

In addition to evaluating student understanding and knowledge of unit texts, these informal assessments offer opportunities for students to delve deeper into the unit content and build their own comprehension. Teachers can use these comprehension checks for making in-the-moment decisions: they can pinpoint which students require additional support and offer them extra help as needed, or they can determine that fewer comprehension supports are needed and remove scaffolding throughout the course of the lesson.

## Texts

### Text Selection

The ability to read, understand, and analyze complex, grade-level texts is vital to students' success as adults. CommonLit 360's reading, writing, listening, speaking, and language instruction is centered around the analysis of such texts. CommonLit 360 units are built around high-quality, grade-level stories, articles, and novels, which provide the foundation for rich content and deep inquiry. To support students' growing reading comprehension, stamina, and overall literacy development, CommonLit 360 selects texts based on multiple factors.

**Rigor and grade level:** CommonLit 360 includes texts that are appropriately challenging for students at each grade level. The texts are leveled using a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures to ensure that they meet the appropriate standards of complexity. These measures, along with consideration of the reader and the task at hand, provide a rigorous reading experience for students at each grade level.

**Quality of knowledge:** The texts provide a foundation of knowledge about the world and help students build upon it, enabling them to better understand and participate in communities outside their own classrooms. Each unit focuses on a concept or theme via a thought-provoking essential question, allowing students to progressively develop their skills in writing, speaking, reading, and collaboration as they engage more deeply with the content over the course of the unit. The units build upon each other over the course of a year, providing a gradual release of responsibility as students develop their skills.

**Quality of writing:** Texts included in the 360 curriculum are chosen for their unique meanings, complexities, and richness, which make them valuable for study and analysis. These complex texts yield mentor passages for writing lessons, and students apply newly acquired skills in multiple modes of writing and culminating tasks.

**Engagement for students:** CommonLit 360 units feature topics and texts that hold students' interest through relatable characters, suspenseful plot elements, thought-provoking ideas or questions, connections to students' personal experiences or interests, relevance to real-world events and issues, and beautiful or evocative language.

**Representation:** CommonLit 360 texts broaden students' understanding of an increasingly diverse world while also recognizing and respecting their own unique identities. The texts themselves represent diverse voices through authors, characters, and speakers, illustrating a range of identities and authentic accounts of people's experiences.

## Texts

**Connections within and across units:** The core texts within each unit connect to the unit's essential question and help students to see the broader context and relevance of what they are reading. These texts also build upon the knowledge from previous units, creating a cohesive and coherent learning experience. CommonLit strives to provide students with a combination of classic and contemporary texts in multiple genres. In addition, the CommonLit library of 3500+ texts may be used to supplement student learning and reading stamina.

### Providing Access to Complex Texts

CommonLit 360 ensures that all students have access to appropriately complex texts at their grade level. It is imperative that teachers become familiar with the complexity of each unit text in order to understand how to best support students in accessing the texts and tasks through differentiated supports.

While differentiated supports can make a world of difference for students who need extra help, they should be provided with careful consideration of a student's needs. Differentiated supports are temporary, adjustable tools that are used to scaffold content, tasks, processes or materials in order to help students better understand and engage with the text at hand. These supports are directly connected to aspects of the text under study and are always student-specific.

Differentiated supports are not intended to alter the text, task, or vocabulary in a text in a way that alters the text's authenticity or lowers its complexity, nor are they meant to provide so many supports that students do not need to engage in productive struggle. Differentiated supports should not be provided to all students, all the time; rather, they should be used judiciously and removed gradually, as students become more confident and independent in their reading and analysis. By using differentiated supports in this way, teachers can help students succeed while also promoting independent learning and critical thinking skills.

## Lessons and Materials in 360 Units

### Lesson Types

- **Unit introduction:** Students are introduced to the unit's topics and texts through engaging discussion questions.
- **Reading:** Students engage in one or more readings of a text. Carefully sequenced writing, discussion and assessment questions guide students through their comprehension and analysis of the unit texts. Novel unit reading lessons are split into during reading questions and independent practice questions.
- **Writing:** Students develop their writing skills by engaging in various writing tasks, such as short responses and essays. Each lesson helps students re-engage with unit texts, understand the writing process, practice different writing styles, and refine their skills through revision and feedback.
- **Discussion:** Students learn explicit speaking and listening skills and participate in structured discussions and debates, promoting critical thinking, collaboration, and active listening. Through these conversations, they analyze and interpret texts, share ideas, and make connections between the curriculum and their own experiences.
- **Related Media Exploration:** Students delve into diverse media resources, such as videos, podcasts, and data sets, to deepen their learning. These explorations enhance understanding of the unit topics and themes and support the development of media literacy skills.
- **Vocabulary:** Students expand their vocabulary through word study, activities and quizzes. This focused word study helps them better comprehend texts, express their ideas more clearly, and engage in more meaningful discussions.
- **Grammar and Usage Activities:** Students work on improving their grammar skills through focused lessons, application practice, and quizzes. They learn about sentence structure, punctuation, and usage rules, which enable them to become more effective communicators in both writing and speaking.
- **Culminating Task:** Students take their culminating tasks through the writing process, developing and refining their ideas, conveying them clearly, and showcasing their mastery of the unit's content and skills.
- **Choice Board:** Students select from a menu of lessons to complete independently

## Lessons and Materials in 360 Units

### Text Access

The CommonLit 360 curriculum uses a diverse range of text types and genres throughout its units, guaranteeing that learners engage with core learning materials in multiple formats. Each unit's teacher-facing Text List can be found on the "Unit Overview" tab of the digital curriculum and in the unit guide PDF for each unit. The 360 curriculum includes access to the following text types:

- **Tradebook:** These are full-length books that schools or districts must purchase or make accessible to students.
- **Digitally Accessible Texts:** These are shorter-length texts that can be accessed online through the CommonLit 360 platform. All texts can be assigned digitally, and most can be downloaded as a PDF or used as part of a hybrid lesson (combined digital and PDF).
- **Multimedia:** The CommonLit 360 program incorporates some unit sources that direct students to external websites such as educational videos or podcasts that are included in Related Media Explorations and that are hosted by other providers. It is possible that unrelated content, such as advertisements or recommended articles, may also be hosted on these external sources and may pose a challenge for some students. When assigning such materials, teachers should review each source and its associated website beforehand to evaluate its content for their students. Teachers can then make instructional decisions based on their students' needs and backgrounds.

### Lesson Access

Each CommonLit 360 lesson is available in PDF format or downloadable as a Google doc. The following lesson types include some digitally-available lessons on the CommonLit 360 platform:

- Reading lessons for all unit types except novel units
- Reading lesson Independent Practice for novel units
- Writing lessons
- Vocabulary quizzes

For lesson types with digital options, teachers are encouraged to choose the lesson format that works best for the students in their classrooms: digital, PDF/Google doc, or a hybrid format.

### Lesson Teacher Copies

All CommonLit 360 lessons include a student copy and a teacher copy available in PDF format or downloadable as a Google doc. These can be downloaded on the CommonLit 360 digital platform from each unit's Lessons and Materials tab. The teacher copy of a lesson mirrors the format of the student copy, with the addition of a cover page and exemplary responses to questions and tasks. The cover page includes the objectives (knowledge and skill focus) of the lesson, notes to teachers, suggested pacing, and facilitation guidance.

## Lessons and Materials in 360 Units

### Lesson Materials

All lesson materials for students and teachers can be accessed through the CommonLit 360 digital platform by clicking on each unit's Lessons and Materials tab.



## INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES

### Reading

The CommonLit 360 curriculum builds teacher and student proficiency and fluency through high-leverage, repeatable reading structures and routines. Each reading lesson is associated with the reading and analysis of a selection of text and includes questions and tasks to support students in engaging deeply with the text and unit content matter. While reading lessons include various supportive scaffolds, teachers are supported in gradually guiding students towards independent application of knowledge and skills throughout each unit.

#### Reading Modalities

Each text is broken into reading sections accompanied by suggested modalities for facilitating reading and instruction. Facilitation suggestions within these reading sections are selected based on the demands of the texts and tasks at hand, and range from a high level of teacher support to a high level of student independence.

**Whole Class Reading:** Whole Class Reading is an instructional routine in which all students in a class receive shared instructional guidance on the same selection of text. The sections of text chosen for this reading routine are typically the most complex and require the most instructional support and guidance from teachers. They require the most close reading and in-depth analysis aligned with the goals of the individual lesson and unit. They are accompanied by higher-order questioning and require students to write to think critically as well as support their analysis with evidence.

**Student-Led Partner or Small Group Reading:** Student-led partner or small group reading is a collaborative reading routine in which two or more students read a selection of text and work on the associated task together. This cooperative routine builds both collaboration and literacy skills: students support group members in working toward a shared goal, model strategies, and share explanations and feedback with one another while they build fluency and depth of understanding about the text at hand.

Sections of text chosen for small group or partner reading are those that require a medium level of instructional intervention from teachers, as these sections are less complex than those that require a high-level of teacher intervention. For example, a section of text appropriate for partner reading may repeat some of the same craft and structure from a previous section of the text that students read with the whole class. Partners therefore apply their learning together in the new section of text.

## Reading

**Independent Reading:** Independent reading is a routine in which students engage in reading and analyzing a section of text with little or no support from teachers or peers. The sections of text chosen for independent reading provide students opportunity to practice and demonstrate reading stamina, fluency, and proficiency. During independent reading, students have the opportunity to engage in an increased volume of reading — acquiring knowledge and language, gaining fluency, and sustaining the mental effort necessary to comprehend complex texts over a longer period of time.

### Repeated Readings

In most CommonLit 360 reading lessons, students carefully reread one or more sections of a text to uncover its deeper meaning. By focusing on the language, structure, literary techniques, and context, they explore how these elements interact and contribute to the text's overall meaning and the author's purpose. Repeated reading opportunities develop students' ability to identify and analyze crucial details within a text, select and cite relevant text evidence, and think critically in order to interpret complex literary works. Opportunities for repeated readings occur in poetry lessons and the Further Analysis section of reading lessons.

### Active Reading

Active reading helps student readers engage more deeply with a text in order to improve their comprehension, critical thinking, and literacy skills. CommonLit 360 supports students in active reading through various methods:

#### During-reading tasks

During first and repeated readings of a text, students are prompted to respond to the text in various ways:

**Annotation tasks** require students to read a passage with a specific purpose, taking focused notes by making inferences, paraphrasing, or synthesizing. These tasks build students' ability to process and comprehend new and complex ideas, and to connect new information to prior knowledge.

**During-reading questions** support students' understanding of key concepts within a text and provide teachers with information about how to best support students with additional instruction. Sequenced from comprehension to extended thinking and analysis, the questions are intended to systematically build students' skills and knowledge. These questions are categorized into four types, each indicating a different modality for text engagement:

## Reading

- **Write** questions encourage students to stop and write about the passage at hand, deepening their learning and analysis.
- **Find Evidence** questions encourage students to identify relevant evidence to support their inferences about and analysis of the text.
- **Turn & Talk** and **Think & Share** questions encourage students to talk about the text with partners or the whole class to help clarify their understanding and generate new ideas.

CommonLit 360 includes more during-reading questions than most students may need and labels these questions as optional. As teachers move through the readings, they can utilize the additional during-reading questions with students who need extra comprehension support.

### After-reading tasks

After students have read a text one or more times, students continue to actively engage in analysis of the text and elaboration of their own ideas:

- **Graphic Organizers** are included in many units to help students summarize texts, synthesize their understandings, organize their ideas while reading, and brainstorm ideas prior to writing or discussing.
- **Post-reading discussions** encourage students to employ unit vocabulary and make text-to-self and cross-textual connections.

### Independent and Supplemental Reading Materials

Independent reading has innumerable benefits for secondary English Language Arts students: it builds stamina, fluency and comprehension, develops critical thinking skills, improves self-reliance, increases motivation and engagement in course materials, and strengthens skills in writing through exposure to a variety of writing styles and techniques. CommonLit 360 provides optional resources for teachers to utilize with their students to build in additional independent reading into the English Language Arts classroom.

### Independent Reading

The goal of the CommonLit 360 curriculum is to strengthen students' ability to comprehend and engage with grade-level texts independently and proficiently by the end of each academic year. It is therefore crucial to build in opportunities to support students with uninterrupted, independent reading practice. Each grade level includes optional guidance and support for teachers who want to incorporate independent reading practices into their local classrooms:

## Reading

- **Suggested Novel Lists:** Several units in each grade level are accompanied by lists of novels and/or full-length informational texts from a variety of genres that relate to the themes and topics of the core unit of instruction.
- **Accountable Independent Reading Routines:** Teachers can encourage application of unit knowledge by promoting these active reading routines. By observing students' written responses, teachers can assess students' reading comprehension and provide feedback about reading practices and skills. Teachers can use reading logs and book lists to engage students in selecting independent reading books that are best suited to individual student needs.
- **Resources for Student-Led Book Clubs:** Teachers who want to build collaborative and supportive independent reading practices can lean into student-led book clubs with these resources, which support teachers and students in creating book club guidelines, setting expectations, and building repeatable routines that engage students in active reading and academic discussions about their independent reading.

### Supplemental Texts

Each CommonLit unit is accompanied by a set of supplemental texts in order to support and extend the knowledge built in core unit texts. They may include different levels (based on quantitative and/or qualitative measures) and genres. Supplemental texts may be used to extend students' engagement in the content of the unit (themes and topics) or as knowledge-building supports to be read concurrently with the essential unit texts.

The supplemental texts range in both their complexity and thematic links to the unit. Each text is available digitally and is prepared with aligned tasks, such as annotation prompts, Guided Reading Mode scaffolded comprehension questions, and multiple choice and short-answer assessment questions.

Because the texts vary in complexity, teachers can use them to support and challenge a wide range of learners. The texts provide an opportunity for remediation and extension within each unit and may be implemented in a variety of ways: as in-class independent reading, in small groups or with partners, as homework, or as student choice reading.

## Writing

The CommonLit 360 curriculum emphasizes the importance of precise and accurate communication in demonstrating learning and understanding. The program is built on the foundation that effective writing stems from a deep understanding of texts and content matter. Writing and grammar practice across the CommonLit curriculum are aligned to standards and recursive to allow for maximum practice and application.

CommonLit 360 writing instruction focuses on teaching students how to compose pieces that are appropriate for a given task, purpose, and audience by using effective vocabulary to create a specific tone, varying sentence forms for effect, and structuring and organizing the piece effectively. Writing and presenting are the primary ways for students to demonstrate their learning throughout the program. Students have ongoing opportunities to write both formally and informally, moving through the writing process and experimenting with different writing skills.

### Formal Writing

In each unit, students work on developing their understanding of the writing process and their ability to apply it effectively. Through this process, students hone their writing skills and improve their ability to produce high-quality written work. They learn new genres of writing, practice components of essays, learn about feedback and revision, and apply learned grammar to their writing. Most culminating tasks include written components that enable students to refine a formal piece of writing they have been developing over time.

### Informal Writing

CommonLit 360 also includes formative assessments and low stakes writing tasks that allow students to practice and showcase their writing, speaking and listening abilities, supported by tools and resources for analyzing and emulating expert writing. Students express their learning and thinking with small on-demand writing actions within each reading lesson. They incorporate their annotations and highlights and apply them to their own analyses of what they have read.

### Writing to Learn

Writing helps students think critically and deepen their understanding of content by actively engaging them in the process of creating new ideas and making connections. At the end of each reading, writing, and discussion lesson, students distill their learning informally through short, on-demand written responses. Each unit's culminating task provides opportunities for students to engage in formal, recursive process writing through prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Engaging in the complete writing process supports students in developing their skills in

## Writing

analysis, synthesis, evaluation and interpretation as they grapple with the content matter of each unit. Additional writing strategies and tools support students in building knowledge through writing: Further Analysis sections of reading lessons support students in analyzing texts deeply, pre-writing graphic organizers empower students to synthesize and organize their analysis, and peer discussion and review protocols help them clarify, refine, and support their ideas.

### Learning to Write

The 360 curriculum helps students write effectively by guiding them through a series of activities that focus on crafting clear and purposeful sentences, paragraphs, essays, and presentations. Students analyze and evaluate mentor sentences, paragraphs and longer passages from the core unit texts and from exemplary student writing to learn about the elements that make these pieces of writing effective, such as word choice, sentence structures, rhetoric, organization, and style. Students then experiment with these new elements in their own work through drafting, revision, and editing. The program emphasizes the importance of understanding the task, purpose, and audience for their writing, and provides opportunities for students to discuss their work with peers and to receive and apply feedback.

### Grammar and Conventions

Developing a deep understanding of grammar and conventions is crucial for literacy growth and achieving college and career readiness. Grammar plays an important role in helping writers express their ideas with precision and clarity. Through the study of grammar and conventions, students can understand and create sentences with a variety of effective grammatical structures.

CommonLit 360 gives students the opportunity to analyze, study, and apply the grammar, syntax, and usage outlined by the standards, with the goal of enhancing students' reading and writing abilities. Throughout the program, students receive explicit instruction in grammar and conventions through grammar and usage activities. They have the opportunity to practice and apply the grammar and conventions in their own writing through informal and formal writing assignments. Culminating tasks reinforce the usage of learned grammar and conventions through assignment requirements, self-assessment checklists, and evaluation rubrics.



# Writing

## Writing Routines and Materials

CommonLit 360 supports students in applying newly learned writing skills through various practice opportunities:

- Independent practice activities assess student skill and comprehension while supporting additional writing practice.
- Grammar and usage practice activities build student fluency with newly learned concepts through application in writing.
- Note-taking graphic organizers encourage students to synthesize and express their ideas clearly.
- Writing checklists build agency in self-assessment and strengthen students' metacognition.

## Speaking and Listening

Academic discourse is essential for literacy development, as it allows students to engage in discussions and debates around ideas and texts, which helps students deepen comprehension, clarify and refine ideas, consider alternate perspectives, and engage in further inquiry. CommonLit 360 places a strong emphasis on speaking and listening in the English Language Arts classroom, and provides both formal and informal opportunities for students to engage in these practices.

Each CommonLit lesson provides students various opportunities to share their ideas out loud with the whole class, small groups, and partners. Students discuss the texts they are reading daily and participate in formal and informal discussions. Turn and talk questions and quick Partner Discussions allow students to express their learning and comprehension of texts quickly and informally. Students engage in formal group and/or class discussions in each unit. Discussion skill lessons explicitly teach students the verbal and nonverbal communication skills that are most valuable for engaging in academic conversation with their peers and expressing their ideas clearly and effectively. Students practice and refine these skills in whole class discussions, which provide a platform for students to share their ideas and perspectives and to engage in critical thinking and reasoning. Small group projects and culminating tasks that involve larger formal presentations provide an opportunity for students to showcase the speaking and listening skills that they have practiced throughout the unit.

### Speaking and Listening Routines and Materials

CommonLit 360 includes supportive instructional routines and materials to guide students' development:

- **Discussion skill lessons:** In these lessons, students read and analyze an exemplar student discussion about one or more of the core unit texts. Annotation questions support students in analyzing the model conversation to infer key listening and speaking skills. As a class, students synthesize their key understandings about the discussion skills and review example sentence stems that can support them in applying the skills in formal and informal academic conversations.
- **Class discussion materials:** Formal class discussions follow discussion skill lessons and are scaffolded to support students through the discussion process: preparing for discussion, during discussion, and post discussion. Students are supported in brainstorming their ideas prior to participating in a formal discussion. During the discussion, materials encourage students to track interesting ideas from classmates, clarify ideas and understanding through targeted questions, and refine their own ideas. Following a formal discussion, materials support students in reflecting on their own discussion performance and setting goals for discussions to follow.

## Speaking and Listening

- **Listening and speaking rubrics:** Each formal discussion and presentation is accompanied by a listening and speaking rubric. Teachers use these rubrics to evaluate student performance on listening and speaking tasks and plan subsequent instruction.
- **Discussion Voice Trackers:** Teachers may use these trackers to make note of student participation and application of discussion skills in formal class discussions.
- **Discussion Protocols Teacher Guide:** While CommonLit 360 suggests clear protocols for whole class discussions, the Discussion Protocols Teacher Guide outlines a number of different discussion structures ranging from a high level of teacher support to a high level of student independence. Teachers are encouraged to select the protocols that best meet the needs of the students in their classrooms.

## Vocabulary Development

The significance of vocabulary instruction is undeniable in the secondary English Language Arts classroom. Research has shown that vocabulary knowledge is critical for reading comprehension. As students acquire more precise vocabulary related to a particular concept or topic, they reap numerous benefits: they are able to comprehend more complex texts about that concept or topic with greater ease, have a better understanding of subtle nuances of expression and ideas, and can communicate their thoughts and ideas more effectively through writing and speaking. As students learn more words about a particular concept or topic, they are able to read, write, discuss, and understand it more thoroughly and effectively.

CommonLit 360's vocabulary work guides students to learn and use high-leverage, grade-level vocabulary words that come from the unit texts and that build on unit topics and themes. CommonLit 360's vocabulary materials include formal instruction in the meanings and connotations of words and practice with those words both in and out of the context of their unit readings. Students complete five vocabulary activities for each set of words, which they then encounter in context for additional practice and application. At the end of each set of vocabulary activities, students complete a vocabulary quiz. They are encouraged to incorporate unit vocabulary in their writing and academic discussions about unit texts and content.

Additionally, in each reading lesson, Tier 2 and Tier 3 words are highlighted and defined for students to continue to grow and use their vocabulary informally.

### Vocabulary Routines and Materials

CommonLit 360 includes supportive instructional routines and materials to guide students' vocabulary development:

- **Vocabulary Introductory Activity:** A slide deck guides students through the first unit vocabulary activity, supporting students in inferring the meaning of vocabulary words through the use of context clues in an example sentence. Students predict the meaning of all vocabulary words and then review the definitions and accompanying images with a teacher.
- **Word Wall:** Each unit provides unit vocabulary in large print format and guidance for teachers on best practices for utilizing a classroom word wall. The Word Wall Teacher Guidance also suggests ways for teachers to extend student practice and application of unit vocabulary through protocols beyond the word wall.

## Research

Research skills are essential for success in both academic and professional life. They support students in building agency and autonomy to enhance their understanding of the world around them and empower students to engage in their local and broader communities.

The CommonLit 360 curriculum focuses on active learning through inquiry and is designed to provide students with the necessary skills to conduct research effectively. In each 360 unit, students engage in a cyclical process of inquiry to explore important issues and topics and present their findings in various forms. The program provides students opportunities to engage in informal and formal research projects, building on skills they learn and practice throughout the course of each text and unit.

Through various research projects and activities, students are able to answer questions by drawing on multiple sources. They are encouraged to generate additional related questions during classroom discussions, allowing for a deeper level of exploration. In addition, students are taught how to gather relevant information from a variety of print and digital sources, how to quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others, and how to avoid plagiarism and follow standard citation format. CommonLit 360 also emphasizes the importance of drawing evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

### Informal research projects

Students receive various opportunities to develop research skills informally throughout each unit. Through less structured research opportunities, students have the chance to explore a topic of interest, find the answers to questions through inquiry, and draw on several sources for relevant information and synthesis.

**Related Media Explorations** are designed to give students an opportunity to quickly research and learn about a topic in a focused way, deepening students' knowledge of a core piece of content related to the themes and/or topics of the broader unit. Students are supported in gathering and synthesizing information from various multimedia and multimodal texts (videos, podcasts, graphs, charts and infographics) in order to present their learning through writing and/or speaking.

**Student Choice Reading** provides students with autonomy and ownership over their learning. Students are able to select texts about topics that they are interested in to build deeper knowledge about the unit content. Students gather information and evidence from their choice reading in order to support their analysis of, claims about, and reflections on the unit's content matter.

## Research

### Formal research and analysis projects

Several units at each grade level engage students in a longer, more structured research project that serves as the unit's summative assessment, or culminating task. Through the exploration of a topic of interest or relevance, these projects help students evaluate and synthesize information across multiple sources, develop academic writing and presenting skills, and cite sources properly. Through these research-forward projects, students learn how to critically analyze different perspectives and sources in order to gain a deeper understanding of the topic at hand, refining their understanding over the course of the unit.

Example research projects:

- **8th grade unit 6 – The Debate Over School Start Time:** Students investigate ideal school start time by analyzing a variety of scientific studies, newspaper articles, and informational texts. Students deepen their understanding of local issues around school start time and hone their skills in gathering and synthesizing evidence from multiple sources in order to argue for a position on the issue.
- **7th grade unit 5 – Influential Voices:** By analyzing speeches written by influential figures, both historical and contemporary, students are challenged to explore how speakers persuade their audiences. Students build knowledge of rhetoric and develop the ability to explain how a speaker's rhetorical choices can motivate or persuade an audience.

The progression of research skills builds over the course of the year, such that students gain grade-level proficiency in inquiry and research by the end of the year.



## Support for English Learners

English Learners benefit from access to language development in an environment that values their linguistic and cultural diversity as they engage in content work at grade-level expectations. English Learners access support through the use of the following practices throughout the CommonLit 360 curriculum:

### **Use Background Knowledge**

At the beginning of each unit, teachers are provided with unit introductions, which create opportunities to connect students' prior knowledge to the new content in order to leverage students' language, literacy, culture and other experiences as they develop and express their understanding in English Language Arts.

### **Engage in Meaningful and Intellectually Challenging Interactions**

Students are provided access to opportunities to engage in collaborative academic discourse and meaningful interactions with teachers and peers through complex texts and content. Carefully constructed questions promote extended discussion about academic content using supports such as sentence stems.

### **Build Academic English and Content Knowledge**

Students are provided access to complex texts and intellectually challenging activities focused on building content knowledge that is essential to learning academic English and developing their productive communication skills. Students are provided with tools to support close reading of texts and development of academic vocabulary. Vocabulary instruction includes a combination of rich and varied language experiences while also explicitly teaching individual academic words.

### **Utilize Scaffolds**

Students are provided with access to scaffolds in order to improve engagement with academic content and linguistic development. These scaffolds include multiple means of representation such as videos, graphics, texts, and read-aloud support features. Lesson scaffolding includes sequencing from whole-group instruction to independent practice; frequent checks for understanding; paired conversations; graphic organizers to enhance access to content; and language models, such as sentence frames and academic vocabulary walls.

### **Accommodations for English Learners**

While not all English Learners will need additional support, for those who do, CommonLit 360 encourages teachers to use multiple strategies and tools to support English Learners' language acquisition.

## Support for English Learners

**Teacher-led strategies may include:**

- pointing out cognates to key vocabulary to leverage first-language skills.
- encouraging students to leverage cognates in their native language to facilitate comprehension of text.
- using flexible grouping by strategically grouping students according to home language.
- encouraging the use of home language to clarify directions and concepts.
- breaking down routines and directions into shorter, more manageable segments.
- using the read-aloud feature of grade-level texts in English for students to follow along as they read to build and reinforce concept and language attainment.
- allowing additional processing time.
- providing opportunities for students to request clarification, repetition, and rephrasing.

**CommonLit 360 tools and resources can be used to:**

- scaffold reading with guiding questions prior to more complex, analytical, text-specific questions to help guide and focus students' reading so they form a solid comprehension.
- provide sentence starters and sentence frames for students to use with listening, writing, and speaking tasks.
- expose and introduce students to new vocabulary specific to English Language Arts instruction and grapple with relevant vocabulary.
- unpack sentences with complex grammatical structures and academic vocabulary.
- ensure students can actively participate in extended discussions to practice academic English.