

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

Table of Contents

Overview

- Is CKLA a comprehensive ELA program?
- Is CKLA really free?
- How was CKLA developed and funded?
- What is a Creative Commons License?
- Why is my contact information required to download CKLA?
- What grades does CKLA cover and how is it structured?
- What is the underlying philosophy of CKLA?
- What is the research basis behind CKLA?
- Is CKLA a scripted program?
- What do independent reviewers say about CKLA?

Rationale and Program Design

- How does CKLA support reading and writing development across preschool–grade 3?
- Why are there two strands of materials in K–3? How do the two strands work together?
- What is the rationale underlying the K–3 Skills Strand?
- What is the rationale underlying the K–3 Listening & Learning Strand?
- Does CKLA teach respect for diverse peoples and cultures?
- How are small groups incorporated into the Skills Strand for K–3?
- What if my standards dictate that content be taught at a different grade level than in CKLA?
- Are there assessments that go with the program?
- What if my district mandates a different ELA program?
- How is writing taught in CKLA?

Alignment to the CCSS

- Is the program aligned to the Common Core State Standards for ELA?
- How does the program support the instructional shifts that are critical to the CCSS?
- Does CKLA support “close reading”?

Materials

- What are the components of the CKLA program?
- Do the Skills strand Student Readers have Lexile ratings?
- Do children read authentic texts?
- Are there any trade books required?
- How can I support students who need more targeted practice with decoding/encoding?
- Are there spelling lists?
- What is the research behind the K and 1 Student Readers breaking up words in the text, such as [dinn.er]?
- How do the stories and materials represent multiple cultures?

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

Diverse Learners

- How does the CKLA program support students who are learning English?
- How do you differentiate instruction for students reading on different levels?

Implementation

- How can the CKLA Listening & Learning Strand for K–3 be used with another ELA program?
- How long does it take to implement CKLA?
- Should I display text from the Read-Aloud Anthology so it can be read next to the Flip Book images?
- May I replace and/or supplement the read-alouds in the Listening & learning Strand to match my students' interests?
- How can we enhance implementation beyond the core materials?
- Can CKLA be used in conjunction with another ELA program?
- What should I do with my leveled reading libraries after we adopt CKLA?

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

Overview of CKLA K–5

Is Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) a comprehensive language arts program?

Yes. CKLA is designed to comprehensively address ELA goals and standards related to reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

CKLA is fully, and explicitly, aligned to the **Common Core State Standards (CCSS)**. More importantly, CKLA meets the rigorous interpretation of the standards set forth in the **Publishers' Criteria**.

CKLA does not need any additional or supplemental programs to support children's language arts development. It is designed to develop readers and writers who can handle the high, complex standards of the current educational context.

Is CKLA really free?

The comprehensive CKLA program for P–3 is now available for free download. Four units for grades 4–5 are also available.

Although materials are downloadable for free, there are costs associated with printing the materials. The volume of program materials may exceed the capability of home or school printers. It is recommended that a school or district work with a professional print shop for printing. Printers may discount pricing based on volume, so schools and districts should thoughtfully consider how they might consolidate their needs to leverage the best pricing available.

For schools that prefer to purchase printed, packaged materials, published CKLA kits for PreK–5 are being produced by Amplify Education, Inc. through a licensing agreement with the Core Knowledge Foundation. For more information about pricing and availability, please **contact Amplify**.

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

How was CKLA developed and funded? How is it distributed?

*After six years of development, pilot testing, and revisions based on teacher feedback, **Core Knowledge Language Arts** for preschool–third grade, as well as several fourth- and fifth-grade units, can now be **downloaded for free**. In addition, preschool–fifth grade can be **purchased** from Amplify Education, Inc.*

Throughout development, the Core Knowledge Foundation sought funding sources that supported making CKLA available for free. As a small nonprofit dedicated to excellence and equity in education, we have long relied on philanthropy to support our research and development of instructional materials and to offer products and services for free or for a relatively low price. For CKLA P–3, about 80% of the funding came from grants and donations, and about 20% came from New York State and Amplify.

In 2012, the Foundation successfully responded to the New York State Education Department’s request for proposals for innovative curricula aligned with the Common Core English language arts and literacy standards in preschool – second grade. The Foundation was eager to apply, and thrilled to win, in light of New York’s commitment to making the materials available for free download at www.engageny.org. This commitment aligned perfectly with the Foundation’s longstanding efforts to make its materials readily available to all children, teachers, and parents.

Prior to winning the New York contract in 2012, the Foundation had already developed, piloted, and revised several iterations of CKLA using feedback collected from teachers during field testing. In accordance with the contract, funds from New York have only been used to refine the K–2 materials, develop CKLA Preschool, deliver professional development in New York, and print materials for New York. Being able to expand the program to preschool is important to support early knowledge and vocabulary growth—and it is in keeping with the Foundation’s mission to serve preschool–eighth grade.

CKLA PreK–3 and several units for CKLA 4–5 are available for **free download** under a **Creative Commons license** (CCL). In addition, CCL CKLA PreK–2 materials are available on www.engageny.org. While the Core Knowledge Foundation retains the copyright to CKLA, everyone is able to download, use, and adapt the materials (but not sell them).

The Foundation encourages teachers and parents to download the program—and has heard from **teachers who are happily downloading** and are thrilled with how their students are responding. However, because CKLA is a comprehensive program that teaches reading, writing, speaking and listening while systematically building knowledge and vocabulary, it has many components. Many of these components need to be printed to be used effectively, but printing small quantities (such as for a few classrooms) can be costly. For more economical alternatives, schools may choose to form consortia so as to make a bulk order from a printer of their choice (which will reduce their per-item costs) or they may choose to order materials from **Amplify**.

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

Given the Foundation’s limited resources and its desire to stay focused on research and development of high-quality materials and professional development, rather than marketing, sales and distribution, Core Knowledge has long engaged in partnerships with various distributors and publishers. For example, the Foundation’s popular kindergarten–sixth grade series for parents, **What Your—Grader Needs to Know**, is published and distributed by Bantam.

In 2013, the Foundation partnered with Amplify to ensure that there would be multiple options for consumers and schools wanting to use CKLA. Core Knowledge selected Amplify Education, Inc. for nationwide distribution of CKLA because of Amplify’s deep understanding of the Common Core State Standards and focus on developing innovative curriculum that realize the promise of the standards. A leader in teacher-friendly, rigorous, digital educational resources that has the capacity to support tens of thousands of schools, Amplify (formerly Wireless Generation), is using its expertise and resources to create a technologically rich version of CKLA. Equally important to the Foundation’s decision to choose Amplify as a partner was Amplify’s commitment to underwrite the development costs to create CKLA for grades four and five, so that a complete PreK–5 curriculum embodying the spirit and promise of the CCSS would be available.

What is a Creative Commons license?

Creative Commons is a nonprofit organization that creates free legal tools for sharing materials—including the texts and artwork that make up CKLA. Creative Commons offers several different licenses; CKLA is covered by a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.

In brief, that means CKLA is freely available for anyone to download, print, use, and adapt, but no one is permitted to sell either the original program or an adaptation of it (without express permission from the Core Knowledge Foundation, which retains the copyright to CKLA). If a user creates an adaptation and wants to distribute it, that is permitted if the adaptation is freely available under terms similar to those explained here and proper attribution is given. Users who are adapting and sharing CKLA should use the following attribution: *This work is based on an original work of the Core Knowledge® Foundation made available through licensing under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License. This does not in any way imply that the Core Knowledge Foundation endorses this work.*

If teachers create lesson plans for use with CKLA that show some CKLA content and/or images, they must freely share those plans, using the attribution above. If teachers wish to sell their lesson plans, they must refrain from showing any CKLA content and/or images.

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

What grades does CKLA cover and how is it structured?

CKLA is a preschool–grade 5 program. While the preschool and K–3 materials respect the important differences between early childhood education and formal schooling, the grade 4–5 materials ensure a smooth transition to the academic rigors of middle school.

CKLA is a coherent program, but there are important differences in the preschool, K–3, and 4–5 materials and approaches. The focus in preschool is to maintain a developmentally appropriate early childhood setting; the structures, routines, and activities are engaging and often playful, yet children receive a solid foundation for future language arts instruction.

The focus in K–3 is to develop fluent reading and writing skills, and to enhance language comprehension by building knowledge and vocabulary. This is accomplished through two strands: the Skills strand and the Listening & Learning strand; each takes about 60 minutes per day. The Skills strand mainly focuses on decoding, encoding, grammar, handwriting, and the writing process; it contains decodable stories on a variety of topics. The Listening & Learning strand mainly focuses on building background knowledge and vocabulary; teachers read aloud stories that are too advanced for students to read on their own, enabling children to enjoy complex texts on a variety of topics from literature, science, social studies, and the arts.

In 4–5, students are still focused on building reading and writing skills as well as knowledge and vocabulary, but the program no longer has two strands. Across the year, students study 8 to 9 content-focused units (including *The Middle Ages*, *Geology*, *Treasure Island*, and *Native Americans*). Taking 90 minutes per day, the various lessons in each unit include read-alouds; whole-group, small-group, and partner reading; close reading; literal, inferential, and evaluative comprehension questions; vocabulary; grammar; writing; morphology and spelling (10–15 words per week); and unit assessments.

All of the materials, P–5, were developed with substantial input from teachers and then were refined based on feedback from teachers and students who used early trial versions of the program.

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

What is the underlying philosophy of CKLA?



The underlying philosophy is that effective ELA instruction revolves around meeting the needs of the students in ways that heed two essential findings from cognitive science: decoding (and encoding) must become automatic and fluent, and broad background knowledge and vocabulary are essential to comprehension.

To be child-centered and research-based, CKLA is designed around the following four principles of instruction:

- 1 *Explicit instruction in the code is necessary for automatic and effortless decoding.* It is not enough to teach children to be familiar with letters and sounds. To create strong, fluent readers, instruction must help children read words automatically and effortlessly. Explicit instruction in, and extensive practice with, the spelling patterns of the English language is the only way that children can transition from learning to read (in which their mental energy is mostly focused on decoding) to reading to learn (in which, since decoding has become automatic, their mental energy can be devoted to comprehension of more complex texts and topics). In K–2, CKLA's Skills strand organizes children's reading experiences to maximize their practice in newly taught spelling-sound patterns. This is achieved in two ways. The first is the organization of instruction. A unique database was created to index every word in the English language and determine the most frequent spelling patterns. CKLA organizes instruction to teach the most frequent spelling patterns first in order to maximize the words children can read and move them into engaging, well-written, decodable texts early in the program. These 100% decodable readers are uniquely designed to provide children intensive practice with the code within an authentic reading experience. They reinforce children's sense of success as readers by eliminating the distraction of encountering untaught spelling patterns or exceptions. These decodable texts not only engage children in a variety of topics, they

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

are written in the style of chapter-books and inspire children to want to read more. By the end of second grade, all sound-spelling patterns have been taught. In grades 3–5, the readers are decodable not because they are restricted in any way, but because students have mastered the code.

- 2 *Background knowledge is essential to strong comprehension.* The ability to be a critical and strategic reader depends on having a wide breadth of knowledge and related vocabulary. Comprehension isn't a transferable skill that can be applied equally well to any text. While reading comprehension strategies are often helpful, the less the reader knows about the topic at hand, the less he or she will grasp. Building knowledge to build strong comprehension is the core premise of CKLA's Listening & Learning strand in K–3. The Listening & Learning strand provides teacher fiction and nonfiction read-alouds organized within domains of knowledge. There are 11–12 domains a year, each taking 10–15 days of instruction and giving children deep exposure to topics such as fables, insects, early Asian civilizations, the five senses, mythology and more. The read-alouds in each domain build on each other, and domains within and across grades build on each other. The result is children with surprisingly broad knowledge of literature, science, social studies and the arts, as well as the ability to comprehend increasingly complex ideas and texts, to make connections and inferences, and to engage in lengthy discussions of the works they are hearing. Grades 4–5 also have domain-based, knowledge-building instruction, even though the program is no longer broken into two strands. By upper elementary school, CKLA students are able to continue developing their skills with instruction that is embedded in domain-based units. As the [P–5 sequence of domains](#) shows, students in grades 4–5 deepen their knowledge from previous grades and expand into new domains.
- 3 *Vocabulary learning is most efficient when it is contextualized, content-based, and constant.* There is nothing wrong with studying vocabulary lists—but the sheer number of words that children know clearly demonstrates that most vocabulary is learned in context, by hearing a word many times and thus having many contexts in which to guess at and infer meanings. The average six year old knows 6,000 words; the average high school graduate knows 40,000 words. Between third and twelfth grades children learn about 3,000 words a year. Not all these words are known equally well and most of these words are never taught—they are inferred through multiple exposures in multiple contexts. Exposure to words that are related to different bodies of knowledge (i.e., domain-specific vocabulary like *photosynthesis* and *couplet*) and exposure to academic words that apply to many topics (e.g., *gravity*, *analyze*, *chorus*, and *trivial*) are both necessary for building a strong vocabulary. Everyday conversations, even classroom conversations, typically contain few of these words. Varied and complex texts on a wide range of topics—fiction and non-fiction—are necessary to provide children the multiple exposures they need to build their vocabulary. Shared reading of carefully sequenced texts, which is at the heart of the Listening & Learning strand, is a powerful way to build young children's vocabulary because it provides multiple exposures to words and ideas. Even better, the texts are more sophisticated than what the children can read on their own, and the teacher is there to answer questions and foster discussions that get students to use the words they are learning. By hearing complex texts on a coherent

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

and systematically ordered set of topics, children begin connecting words to each other, to words they already know, thus forming an intricate web of words that they will continue to weave their whole lives. These words, and their connections, becomes children’s mental encyclopedia, allowing them to continually, and ever more easily, access the knowledge they need to understand what they read. By grades 4–5, children are reading complex texts on their own, with the teacher strategically supporting students to more deeply analyze the text.

- 4 *The connection between oral and written language must be supported.* Although children do transition from learning to read to reading to learn in elementary school, it is not until the end of middle school (on average) that students’ reading comprehension is as strong as their listening comprehension. Even as children become strong readers and writers, there is a benefit to hearing and discussing complex texts that the teacher reads aloud. What is more, reading and writing are not all there is to English language arts—listening and speaking are important too. CKLA respects all aspects of language development, and is designed to ensure that children become competent in all modes of communication.

What is CKLA's research basis?

CKLA is based on decades of research showing that reading depends on automatic, fluent decoding as well as broad knowledge and a large academic vocabulary.

Combining **well-established findings** from cognitive science with classroom-based feedback from hundreds of teachers, CKLA ensures that children will learn to listen, speak, read, and write well. Researchers established decades ago that reading comprehension and critical thinking are only possible with relevant prior knowledge. Since students should be able to read and think about a wide variety of topics, their education must deliver broad knowledge of a wide variety of topics. But they shouldn’t just jump from one topic to the next. Learning about an academic domain, and acquiring the vocabulary of that domain, depends on staying focused on a topic and progressing from basic to in-depth materials and activities over two to three weeks. This gives students time to digest new concepts and practice using new words. These basic findings from cognitive science form the research foundation for CKLA (and the **Core Knowledge Sequence**).

Results from a three-year pilot of CKLA in kindergarten through second grade in New York City public schools show that students in the 10 schools using CKLA outperformed their peers in the 10 comparison schools on measures of reading, science, and social studies. **Read about** the CKLA pilot in the press.

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

Is CKLA a scripted program?

No. CKLA is a supportive program that provides everything new teachers need, but there is no script and teachers are expected to take more and more ownership of the program as they acquire experience teaching it.

As a research-based and educator-informed program, CKLA reflects what we know about good teaching. Good teaching requires being intentional about the content you want to teach and, at the same time, responsive to the needs, ideas, and questions of your students on a moment-by-moment basis.

CKLA lessons provide a detailed roadmap to what to teach, freeing teachers to focus on their students. Each CKLA classroom is unique.

CKLA lessons are also designed to support all teachers. As such, the materials are sufficiently detailed for teachers who are new to teaching or new to teaching language arts in the way that is done within CKLA. This supportive lesson structure cannot, and was never designed to, replace good teaching. Good teaching will make the activities and lessons come alive in ways that are specific to the classroom, teacher, and students.

What do independent reviewers say about CKLA?

Experts in standards-based education found, “Overall, CKLA’s coverage of writing, language, listening, and speaking is very strong.”

Knowing that educators are searching for curricula truly aligned to the Common Core State Standards, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute commissioned Elizabeth Haydel and Sheila Byrd Carmichael, two nationally recognized experts in standards-based education, to review the English language arts curriculum modules on [EngageNY](#). EngageNY is a website created by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) to support Common Core implementation. Through NYSED’s competitive process, Core Knowledge won the contract to provide English language arts curriculum modules for preschool through second grade. As a result, CKLA’s P–2 Skills strand units and Listening & Learning strand domains are freely available through EngageNY (as well as our [Free Curriculum page](#)).

Titled [***Uncommonly Engaging? A Review of the EngageNY English Language Arts Common Core Curriculum***](#), the report gives high marks overall to the EngageNY modules. Regarding CKLA, the reviewers found that:

The texts in the Listening and Learning Strand are sufficiently complex—often difficult—as well as important, worthy of rereading, and well chosen to build students’ cultural and academic literacy. There is also an excellent balance of fiction and nonfiction, including a significant number of high-quality informational texts....

The PreK–2 curriculum places knowledge—including literary knowledge—at the center.

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

This emphasis is grounded in research that demonstrates a strong link between reading comprehension and content knowledge....

The Core Knowledge curriculum sets a strong and compelling example for curriculum developers, as it lays out a detailed sequence of instruction across a range of domains. (In second grade, for instance, the domains include Early Asian Civilizations and the Ancient Greek Civilization.)...

Overall, CKLA's coverage of writing, language, listening, and speaking is very strong....

The coverage of foundational reading skills in CKLA is outstanding.

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

Rationale and Program Design

How does the program support children’s reading and writing success across preschool–grade 3 in a systematic way?

Reading and writing—decoding and encoding—are inverse processes and the CKLA program teaches them as such.

Further, the ability to read and write is grounded in the ability to listen and speak. CKLA supports children’s success by explicitly recognizing these two facts in the design of its program. Children’s speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills are supported daily in intentional and systematic ways. The emphasis that any one of these individual skills receives during the CKLA instructional block shifts across preschool–3 in developmentally appropriate ways. This comprehensive, developmental approach supports children’s success as they move from being primarily oral language users in preschool and kindergarten to skilled oral and written language users by the end of third grade.

In K–3, students work their way up to a five-step writing process: planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Beginning in grade 4, the CKLA writing process expands to seven components: planning, drafting, sharing, evaluating, revising, and editing (and the optional component of publishing). An important change between the writing process in grade 3 and grades 4–5 is that the writing process is no longer conceptualized as a series of scaffolded, linear steps that students follow in a set sequence. Rather, students move back and forth between components of the writing process in a flexible manner, similar to the process mature and experienced writers follow.

In addition to specific writing lessons, there are numerous writing opportunities for students throughout CKLA. Especially in grades 2–5, students regularly engage in writing short answers in response to text-based questions. In these writing opportunities, students focus on (1) the use of evidence from the text and (2) individual sentence construction.

Why does CKLA in K–3 have two strands of materials? How do the two strands work together? Why do grades 4 and 5 have units instead of the two stands?

CKLA is based on decades of cognitive science research revealing that reading is a two-lock box—a box that requires two keys to open. The first key is decoding skills, which are addressed in the Skills strand of CKLA. The second key is oral language, vocabulary, and background knowledge sufficient to understand what is decoded. These are covered in the Listening & Learning strand of CKLA. Together, these two strands unlock a lifetime of reading for all children.

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

The Skills strand provides intentional and systematic support in building decoding skills. The lessons support learning related to phonemic awareness, sound-letter patterns (or spelling patterns), decoding (both in explicit lessons and with engaging decodable texts), writing mechanics, and writing structure and processes on a daily basis, for 60 minutes.

The Listening & Learning strand develops young children’s language and background knowledge. By exposing children to rich and complex texts through daily read-alouds, engaging in text-based and analytic discussions of the text and content, and building connections from the text to the work of the classroom through extension activities, the Listening & Learning strand provides daily, extensive (60 minutes) broadening and deepening of children’s oral language and comprehension.

Until the end of second grade, there is no systematic alignment in the content of the students’ readers in the Skills strand and the content of the texts teachers read aloud in the Listening & Learning strand. This is for pragmatic and developmental reasons. During the interactive read-alouds in the Listening & Learning strand, young children hear, understand, and use concepts, vocabulary, and sentence structures that are far more sophisticated than what they can read. Within the Skills strand, however, the priority is to ensure that children are systematically learning the code, so that by the end of second grade all children can read complex text independently. Readers in the Skills strand are written by expert children’s authors to be both engaging and 100% decodable. Thus, both strands offer rich texts—the texts simply prioritize different things. Since the readers in both strands are systematically organized, the fact that the content is not aligned in the early grades is beneficial: Students are exposed to more topics and thus have more opportunities to build broad knowledge and vocabulary.

At the very end of grade 2, when children’s instruction in the code is wrapping up, the Skills strand reader is on the War of 1812, a domain that students learn about in the Listening & Learning strand about mid-way through grade 2.

In third grade, the Skills strand readers and the Listening & Learning strand read-alouds consistently contain the same domain-based content. At this point, students have mastered the code; when they encounter words with spellings that have not been taught explicitly, they should be able to analyze these words using their code knowledge and make inferences about words and phrases using the surrounding text.

By grade 4, students should be able to independently read increasingly complex text, as well as respond in writing to these same texts. Consequently, in grades 4 and 5, CKLA does not have separate strands of instruction. Instead, each unit covers one domain of content and a variety of skills, including writing, grammar, morphology, spelling, and reading.

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

What is the rationale underlying the K–3 Skills strand of materials?

As explained in the [underlying philosophy FAQ](#), to create strong, fluent readers, instruction must help children decode words automatically and effortlessly. The Skills strand provides the explicit instruction and practice necessary to attain such fluency.

The CKLA program takes a comprehensive approach to teaching the code of the English language in the Skills strand. While the English language only has 26 letters, these letters combine to create 150 spelling patterns that represent 44 sounds of language. In most reading programs, children are explicitly taught only a fraction of this information and must glean the rest from ad hoc and incidental exposure to these spelling patterns through text. CKLA focuses on explicitly teaching each of the 44 sounds and the 150 ways that these sounds are represented (via letters and letter combinations). This comprehensive approach assures educators that children have the knowledge they need to address any text and any word.

What is the rationale underlying the K–3 Listening & Learning strand of materials?

As explained in the [underlying philosophy FAQ](#), reading comprehension depends on having knowledge of the topic of the text—so the Listening & Learning strand’s primary purpose is to build broad knowledge.

The Listening & Learning strand reflects the fact that knowledge, comprehension, and vocabulary are intimately related. The materials are designed to provide children sustained time on a variety of domains (bodies of knowledge) through shared read-alouds and discussions. This coherent organization of content is critical to building knowledge, inferring new vocabulary, and enabling comprehension. The content-rich, intentionally sequenced nature of the read-alouds within Listening & Learning creates the optimal context for incidental and explicit vocabulary-learning opportunities. After the read-aloud, children analyze the text through interactive discussion questions, engage in activities that foster their comprehension of complex sentences and ideas, and extend the ideas of the read-aloud into other activities in the classroom. In this way, the lessons create rich, academically oriented, oral language experiences that promote both receptive and expressive language skills.

Does CKLA teach respect for diverse peoples and cultures?

In addition to teaching key skills, CKLA’s primary goals are to start students on the path toward acquiring (1) the knowledge that speakers and writers assume literate adults have and (2) the depth and breadth of knowledge needed to fully grasp the importance of diversity to human history and current affairs.

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

To help students truly value humanity’s diversity, CKLA ensures that children become familiar with civilizations from around the world. Students may not remember every detail in the teacher read-alouds or their readers, but they will know that people from everywhere have made many important contributions.

Works of fiction also help children develop an appreciation for diverse cultures. For example, in the *Different Lands, Similar Stories* domain, students enjoy identifying similarities and differences in stories like “Little Red Riding Hood” from Germany, “Hu Gu Po” from China, and “Tselane” from Botswana.

To help students truly value America’s diversity, CKLA devotes a substantial amount of time to our country’s laudable yet troubled history. By introducing core concepts early and then slowly building more detailed knowledge, CKLA enables students to understand that the US is both an imperfect nation and a great nation—a nation whose best qualities emerge from its diverse people and their shared devotion to democracy. While the kindergarten domains introduce Native Americans, Columbus, and America’s founding, by the end of second grade students know a great deal about America’s struggle to extend the principles of liberty and equality of opportunity to all people.

Fighting for a Cause, which comes at the end of second grade, is an absolutely crucial domain for reconciling the gap between the saddest times in our history and our principles as set forth in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. This domain builds on *Presidents and American Symbols* from kindergarten, *A New Nation* from first grade, and *The Civil War* from earlier in second grade; it shows that determined people can bring America closer to making its principles reality.

For more on CKLA’s approach, see “[Core Content, Core Values](#).”

How are small groups incorporated into the K–3 Skills strand?

Small groups are incorporated flexibly and dynamically to support the needs of children on an ongoing and daily basis.

Opportunities for small group work occur daily in the Skills strand. One recurring lesson activity that lends itself to small group instruction is the use of the Skills readers. The systematic nature of the Skills strand means that, once students have been properly placed for instructional purposes at the beginning of the year, students in a given classroom will read the same decodable text, with different levels of teacher scaffolding and support. Guidance is provided in the Skills Teacher Guides for each lesson so that the teacher may direct the most capable students to read either independently or with partners, as she or he works directly with a smaller group of students to provide guided reading instruction of the same decodable text. In addition, each reader includes a Pausing Point or supplemental stories/text so that faster, more capable readers have the opportunity to read additional stories. It should be noted that skills lessons intentionally plan and allocate time for re-reading of the same text on different days, so that if the teacher has devoted her attention to one group of students during the initial reading, she may refocus her attention on other students during the second reading. Differentiating the level of support provided to different students as they are reading allows the

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

teacher to provide differential support to children as they engage in their grade-level text. Another recurring lesson activity that likewise lends itself to small group instruction is specific skills reinforcement practice. Often, this involves student completion of a worksheet that provides opportunities for students to apply specific skills that have been introduced earlier that day or on previous days. The Skills Teacher Guides suggest teachers use a differentiated approach during this time as well. Teachers may create small groups, directing a group of more capable students to complete the activity independently, while providing more guided scaffolding with another group. Teachers are also encouraged to use these small group practice times to differentiate even further as warranted for a particular group of students. Instead of completing the practice activity designated on a particular day, a teacher may choose to select another activity from either the unit Pausing Point or the Assessment and Remediation Guide to provide targeted remediation in specific skills.

There are many other ways that small groups can be incorporated into the Skills lessons to support students. It is important to note that small groups are always used flexibly in the Skills strand. There is no such thing as a standing reading group. Rather, groups are used much more dynamically to address the needs of students on an ongoing and daily basis. This approach reflects a data-driven instructional approach, which is explicitly incorporated into the Skills strand. The Skills strand encourages teachers to use activities within the daily lesson for informal assessment. Furthermore, every skills unit has an end-of-unit assessment of new skills taught during that unit. The Skills Teacher Guides provide explicit guidance to help teachers interpret each student's performance, analyze errors and then select appropriate activities from the Pausing Point or the Assessment and Remediation Guide to provide targeted remediation in specific skills.

Through these assessment tools, the teacher can glean information on what individual students know (and don't know) on an almost daily basis, as well as at the end of every unit. As such, he or she can respond by forming small groups to reinforce or extend the content as frequently as needed.

What if my state standards dictate that the domain content be taught at a different grade level than where it appears in CKLA?

Because the domains have been sequenced to build on each other, movement of CKLA domains within or across grade is not recommended.

However, if the content must be moved to support state standards, the following guidelines will be helpful:

- If the your state standards dictate a subsequent grade level, **teach the domain** as intended by CKLA and then review the content in the grade at which your state standards have placed the content. Repetition in the form of review can be helpful, so long as teachers in two (or more) grade levels aren't unwittingly repeating all of the same content in detail.
- If state standards have placed the content prior to the CKLA grade level, you can consider using the CKLA domain at the lower grade level, but should ensure that review takes place when you arrive at that domain in the **normal CKLA sequence** since it may provide crucial prior knowledge for subsequent domains in CKLA.

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

Are there assessments that go with the program?

Yes. The program has a variety of diagnostic and classroom assessments.

There are curriculum-based assessments of both the skills and knowledge (to inform instruction), placement assessments in grades 1 and 2 for the Skills strand, and end-of-the-year Skills strand assessments in K–3. These assessments are built into the units of instruction/domains within the teacher guides/teacher anthologies. There are also informal progress monitoring tools built into the teacher guides. In grades 4–5, there are beginning-of-the-year assessments, frequent spelling assessments and comprehensive unit assessments.

What if my district mandates another language arts program?

Other programs do not systematically build knowledge the way CKLA does in the early grades, so the K–3 Listening & Learning strand can always be used as a supplement. It may even replace much of your science and social studies content.

If the district-mandated program primarily addresses teaching the mechanics of reading, (i.e., decoding/phonics skills), then CKLA’s Listening & Learning strand will be complementary. If there is not sufficient time allotted in the English language arts block to implement both, the Listening & Learning domains can be presented in your history/social studies and science blocks. It is important to recognize that the **domains have been sequenced** coherently to build on one another, so whenever possible, the order of presentation should be maintained within and across grades.

If your schedule includes a regular read-aloud time in addition to the ELA block, you can also use the Listening & Learning strand effectively during this time.

How is writing taught in CKLA?

Writing in multiple genres is taught through a process that builds from three highly scaffolded steps to seven flexible steps.

In addition to explicit lessons in handwriting, spelling, and grammar, writing is taught throughout K–5. Instruction begins with a three-step writing process—plan, draft, and edit. The process is reinforced as each new writing genre is addressed. Each genre is taught through a gradual reduction in scaffolding over a 6-lesson duration that includes teacher modeling, group practice, independent practice, and independent application. This systematic approach allows for continued support and predictable learning as children progress in their knowledge of text types and complexity of writing. By grade 3, students have worked their way up to a five-step

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

writing process: planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Beginning in grade 4, the CKLA writing process expands to seven components: planning, drafting, sharing, evaluating, revising, and editing (and the optional component of publishing). An important change between the writing process in grade 3 and grades 4 and 5 is that the writing process is no longer conceptualized as a series of scaffolded, linear steps that students follow in a set sequence. Rather, students move back and forth between components of the writing process in a flexible manner, similar to the process mature and experienced writers follow.

In addition to specific writing lessons, there are numerous writing opportunities for students throughout CKLA. Especially in grades 2–5, students regularly engage in writing short answers in response to text-based questions. In these writing opportunities, students focus on (1) the use of evidence from the text and (2) individual sentence construction.

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

Alignment to Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

Is the program aligned to the CCSS?

Yes. CKLA is fully aligned to the CCSS.

CKLA is 100% aligned to both the knowledge-building spirit of the standards and to each of the individual standards. At the individual standard level, **the alignment is explicit**. It is present at the domain level and unit level, as well as the lesson level; this explicit alignment is detailed in the teacher materials for the given domain or unit.

It is important when considering the materials in light of the CCSS that the focus be on the grade-level standards, not the anchor standards. The anchor standards provide the essentials for college and career readiness—as such, they are not designed to be followed literally in the early grades. So, for example, while anchor standard 1 states “Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text” one of the corresponding standard for kindergartners is “With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.”

In terms of the spirit of the CCSS, that is captured in the ELA standards introduction:

Students who meet the Standards readily undertake the close, attentive reading that is at the heart of understanding and enjoying complex works of literature.... They actively seek the wide, deep, and thoughtful engagement with high-quality literary and informational texts that builds knowledge, enlarges experience, and broadens worldviews. They reflexively demonstrate the cogent reasoning and use of evidence that is essential to both private deliberation and responsible citizenship in a democratic republic. In short, students who meet the Standards develop the skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening that are the foundation for any creative and purposeful expression in language.

Students who complete the full CKLA program are well on their way to meeting or exceeding the college- and career-readiness goals that shaped the CCSS, as well as becoming engaged, productive, responsible citizens who enjoy lifelong learning.

How does the program support the **instructional shifts** that are critical to CCSS alignment?

The shifts are demonstrated primarily through interactive read-alouds, although evidence of the shifts is apparent throughout the program.

Fully implementing the Common Core Standards requires some shifts in prevailing instructional approaches. For early grades language arts, these shifts can be summarized as (1) balancing

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

fiction and nonfiction text, (2) building knowledge, (3) supporting students' capacity to learn from increasingly complex texts, (4) giving text-based answers, (5) writing from sources, and (6) explicit support to the acquisition of academic vocabulary. The following sections document the primary ways that CKLA meets the demands of these shifts.

- 1 The amount of nonfiction gradually increases, reaching the 50-50 balance of fiction and nonfiction by third grade.** The CCSS require that by fourth grade, students' texts reflect an equal balance of fiction and nonfiction. This balance is achieved across the day, not just in children's language arts block. The standards suggest that reading should occur in all subjects; such a focus on texts as the basis for learning in ELA, history, science, etc. is what results in the balance of fiction and nonfiction. This same approach cannot be taken in the early grades (K–2) when children are just learning to read (and not yet reading to learn). As such, the Listening & Learning strand supports children's acquisition of the knowledge and vocabulary needed to be successful with fiction and nonfiction texts later on. To do this, we provide a balance of fiction and nonfiction, with the percentage of nonfiction growing across the K–2 years. The specific percentages are as follows: kindergarten is 69% fiction and 31% informational; grade 1 is 56% fiction and 44% informational; grade 2 is 51% fiction and 49% informational.
- 2 Read-alouds in the Listening & Learning strand are designed according to the latest research to build knowledge and vocabulary in history, science, the arts, and more.** The Listening & Learning strand exposes children to series of carefully sequenced, increasingly complex texts organized around rich domains of knowledge related to history, geography, science, culture, society, and the arts. Children stay on a single domain across 2 to 3 weeks of instruction, hearing and discussing approximately 10 unique read-alouds in each domain. This approach allows for the domain immersion needed to acquire new vocabulary as well as breadth and depth of knowledge building. Both within and across grades, domains build upon each other, allowing all children to slowly learn to comprehend increasingly complex text.
- 3 The texts in both the Listening & Learning strand and the Skills strand increase in complexity as the program progresses within and across grades.** Because listening comprehension outpaces children's reading comprehension until the end of middle school, on average, the Listening & Learning strand provides an opportunity for children to access both the language and the knowledge aspects of complexity immediately—through listening to high-quality fiction and nonfiction.
- 4 In the Skills strand, the language and knowledge demands of the texts increase, but remain decodable based on the aspects of the code that have been taught to date.**
- 5 Both strands engage students in appropriate means of providing text-based answers—orally, pictorially, and eventually in writing.** In the early grades especially, the Listening & Learning strand offers a unique opportunity for children to engage with sophisticated, teacher-read texts and participate in class discussions that call for students to answer text-based

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

questions. For more information related to providing text-based answers, please see the [FAQ about close reading](#).

- 6 **Together, the Skills and Listening & Learning strands enable students to read and digest various sources and then write by drawing on those sources.** While the Skills strand teaches all the mechanics of spelling and writing, the Listening & Learning strand prepares students to become writers by building their knowledge, vocabulary, and oral language abilities. Because writing is grounded in the ability to express oneself (both one's opinions and what one has learned from multiple sources), a great deal of intentionality in the Listening & Learning strand has been placed on developing the oral expressive language skills that underlie strong writing. The ability to answer text-based comprehension questions in full sentences, to identify key details of a text, to sequence events in a text, and to provide reasons for answers are all fostered orally within the program.
- 7 In both strands of the program, CKLA teaches children the process of using the text as a springboard for understanding. The Listening & Learning strand encourages students and teachers to return to passages of the text when discussing the read-aloud. Stories in the student readers in the Skills strand are accompanied by opportunities for students to respond in writing to the text. Initially, students answer text-based questions with words or short phrases, but as the program progresses, and handwriting and spelling skills develop, required answers become more elaborate and children engage in genre writing, collaboratively and independently.
- 8 **The Listening & Learning strand offers repeated exposures to academic vocabulary through authentic texts and explicit word instruction.** Exposure to academic vocabulary through complex texts is the most powerful way to support children's vocabulary acquisition. The domain-based and complex texts that teachers read aloud in the Listening & Learning strand are well suited to support children's academic vocabulary acquisition. Further, the lessons involve activities in which children engage in deeper analysis of key words within the read-aloud. This combination of incidental exposure and analytic word work reflects a research-based approach to efficiently building depth and breadth of vocabulary.

Does CKLA support "close reading"?

Yes. Students engage in close reading beginning in second grade. Prior to second grade, the lessons emphasize text-based questions and discussions in both the Listening & Learning and Skills strands, as a way of preparing young children to successfully engage in close reading by second grade.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have placed increasing attention on the practice of close reading, including asking text-dependent questions that are worthy of students' time to answer. CKLA includes explicit instructions to guide teachers in using a close reading

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

approach with particular excerpts from students' readers. These lessons focus students on the text itself and precisely what meanings can be derived from close examination of the text. If you wish to read more about close reading or if you would like resources for creating your own close reading lessons, please visit [**Achieve the Core**](#).

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

Materials

What are the components of the CKLA program?

CKLA includes a range of student activity books, teacher read-alouds, rich images, student readers, and more.

In preschool, the primary materials are teacher guides for each of the seven domains, trade books, a rich and varied array of images, learning center cards, posters with favorite rhymes, and student activity books. For a quick overview of the materials, please see the CKLA [**Preschool Visual Guide**](#).

In K–3, within the Listening & Learning strand, there are 11–12 domains in each grade. Each domain has a teacher anthology and flip book/media disk. At the back of each teacher anthology are a variety of student activities. Within the Skills strand there are teacher guides, decodable student readers, student workbooks, and a variety of supplemental materials (e.g., spelling cards and folders for activities) to support implementation. For a complete look at materials for both the Skills and Listening & Learning strands for K–3, please see the [**CKLA Visual Guide**](#).

In CKLA for grades 4 and 5, each unit contains a teacher guide, student reader, student activity book, digital components, and alignment chart to support implementation.

Do the Skills Readers have Lexile ratings?

Yes. The Metametrics Lexile ratings for the decodable Skills Readers are as follows:

Kindergarten: 330L-400L

Grade 1: 450L-610L

Grade 2: 430L-660L

Grade 3: 560L-810L

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

Do children read authentic texts?

Yes. In K–3, the texts were written by children’s authors for the CKLA program and are original, authentic, and engaging fiction and nonfiction texts. In 4–5, there is a combination of trade books, texts written for CKLA, and excerpted texts.

Are there any trade books required?

While trade books are used in preschool, in K–3 CKLA has contracted with children’s authors to write books for the program. This keeps costs down for schools and ensures that the texts are always available. CKLA for grades 4 and 5 uses a combination of trade books, original texts, and excerpted texts.

In preschool, lessons are organized around trade books as this is consistent with best practices for creating a language- and literacy-rich preschool environment.

In K–3, the cost and volume of the texts made it more cost-effective to hire children’s authors to write new books instead of relying on existing trade books. Thus, the texts used in both the Skills strand and the Listening & Learning strand are authentic books; they are authored by children’s writers and unique to the CKLA program. Teachers have been supportive of this approach because they no longer have to search (or find substitutes) for hard-to-find books.

As a supplement, in the K–3 Listening & Learning strand we have an extensive list within each domain of relevant trade books that can be incorporated into the classroom or used as lists to be sent home.

How can I aid students who need more targeted practice with decoding and encoding?

The Assessment and Remediation Guides for K–3 and Decoding and Encoding Remediation Supplement for Grades 4–5 are supplemental resources for teachers to more specifically target and address individual students’ needs.

In K–3, each grade has a comprehensive *Assessment and Remediation Guide* aligned with the Skills strand units; these guides are freely available on the [Free Curriculum page](#).

These *Assessment and Remediation Guides* go beyond the teacher and student materials included in each CKLA Skills unit to further support teachers’ decision-making and lesson planning when individual children need more robust review and remediation of specific letter-sound correspondences and phonics skills.

Teachers typically might refer to the *Assessment and Remediation Guide* following an end-of-unit formative assessment to identify additional resources for use with students needing additional practice on specific skills during the Pausing Point and/or in small group as instruction as the next unit proceeds.

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

In grades 4 and 5, a *Decoding and Encoding Remediation Supplement (DERS)* is freely available on the [Free Curriculum page](#). This resource helps students who are identified as needing more targeted practice with decoding and encoding. In each grade, a beginning-of-year assessment (included in the CKLA materials) should be completed in the first weeks of the school year to gauge students' fluency, prosody, and reading comprehension. By analyzing this assessment and using the optional fluency assessments throughout the year, teachers can refer to the *DERS* to target student decoding and encoding gaps as needed.

Each guide includes tools and resources, including student materials, to assist teachers in:

- determining student needs,
- selecting activities and student materials to target specific needs,
- adjusting (accelerating or reducing) instructional difficulty, and
- conducting progress monitoring.

Teachers can selectively download and print the materials to tailor their instruction to students' needs. The *Assessment and Remediation Guide* and *Decoding and Encoding Remediation Supplement* may also be used by interventionists specifically targeting RTI needs.

Are there spelling lists?

Yes. Beginning in first grade, the units within the Skills strand have spelling lists, as well as spelling practice infused in other activities. Prior to that there are lists of words that children write and learn.

In CKLA, spelling is not taught as an isolated list of words each week, but as a continually reinforced skill. As such, writing and reading work together to reinforce specific spelling/letter patterns. For example, a unit at the end of K teaches the digraph “i_e” for the sound /ie/. The writing work and spelling work in that unit will ask children to write words using this digraph, to write words from dictation (a traditional spelling test/activity), to answer story questions using words that would involve this spelling pattern, and to read stories that contain words that use this spelling pattern. Instruction in morphology and spelling continues through fifth grade.

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

Why do the K–1 readers break up words in the text like this [dinn.er]? Can you explain the research and thinking for children seeing text this way?

These text-based prompts are designed to help children visually chunk words in ways that reinforce the spelling-sound patterns that they are learning. These text-based prompts fade as children progress in the program.

In the [dinn.er] example, the text-based prompt of dividing the word into two chunks “dinn” and “er” helps focus children on the fact that there are four sounds in the word dinner. The first chunk has three sounds: consonant-vowel-consonant syllable of /d/ /i/ /n/. These sounds are shown by the following spelling patterns: “d” for the /d/ sound, “i” for the /i/ sound and “nn” for the /n/ sound. The second chunk is a vowel-controlled /r/ sound (which is a blend of a vowel and /r/ into a single sound /er/) and is shown by the two-letter team (i.e., digraph) “er.”

How do the stories and materials represent multiple cultures?

CKLA teaches children about people, cultures, events, and ideas from all over the world, past and present. The content, characters, and illustrations are diverse, so all children will see themselves, and their heritage, reflected in the program—and they will learn about others as well.

Much of this diverse knowledge building occurs in the Listening & Learning strand, where the domains, and the read-alouds in each domain, are so well organized that far more content is taught than in other early grades programs. Teacher do not have to make agonizing tradeoffs between traditional Western Civilization content and the equally important books, ideas, people, and events emphasized in multicultural approaches to education. CKLA provides both throughout its read-alouds in literature, science, history, and the arts. In grades 4–5, students deepen global studies they started in earlier grades, such as Islamic Empires, Early American Civilizations, Western Europe, and Native Americans.

The list of domains shows that children will be exposed to classic tales like Aesop’s fables, *The Three Little Pigs*, and *Peter Rabbit* and they will also find *Medio Pollito* (a Latin American tale), *It Could Always Be Worse* (a Yiddish folktale), and the Anansi stories (trickster tales from Africa). They will hear about Susan B. Anthony, Rosa Parks, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Cesar Chavez. They will learn about American history and they will also study cultures from around the world—Ancient Egypt, Early Asian Civilization, the Maya, Aztec, and Inca civilizations, and others.

To see this global knowledge building throughout CKLA, you can explore the [**list of domains for P–5**](#).

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

Materials for Diverse Learners

How does the program support students who are learning English?

CKLA supports English learners (ELs) by providing a strong, comprehensive approach to English language arts instruction. The program’s heavy emphasis on listening and speaking, as well as building knowledge and vocabulary, should be especially helpful to ELs.

According to Claude Goldenberg, a professor at Stanford University and a leading researcher in bilingual education and English as a second language, what educators and researchers have learned about good reading instruction for all students seems to also hold true for ELs—but ELs being instructed in English need some additional supports. For a detailed examination of how to teach reading to ELs (in their first language, which has inherent value as it leads to bilingualism and biliteracy, and in English), see Goldenberg’s recent [chapter](#) in the Handbook of Reading Research.

The design of CKLA is based on what educators and researchers have learned about good reading instruction. The Skills strand provides children systematic, explicit, and comprehensive instruction in the code of the English language. The sound-first approach in CKLA (as described under the FAQ ["What is the rationale underlying the Skills strand?"](#)) is particularly supportive of ELs, as it lets them focus first on the sounds in words and then make the translation to how that sound is represented in the English alphabet. Explicit grammar lessons are also a feature of the Skills strand, which is consistent with the best thinking about how to build the foundational language skills needed to learn a second language. Anecdotal evidence from teachers using the Skills materials with diverse students indicates that the Skills materials are accessible for all learners, including ELs.

The vocabulary work, multiple meanings work, guided listening supports, and text exposure within the Listening & Learning strand also are beneficial to ELs.

In addition, the *Supplemental Guides* for grades K–2 provide further support to educators seeking to meet the specific needs of ELs (as well as children with weak or lagging language skills). The *Supplemental Guides* adjust the pacing of instruction, provide more specific guidance on explicit instruction for Tier 2 (broadly academic) and Tier 3 (domain specific) vocabulary words, and offer deeper support for syntactic awareness. They also feature instructional tools for altering instruction in critical ways, including adjusting:

- the required modes of participation by children (e.g., using visual supports or receptive approaches for checking comprehension);
- the expressive language demands on children (e.g., providing sentence frames and allowing questions to be yes/no instead of open ended);
- the attentional demands on children (e.g., repeating refrains to help children listening and actively participate);
- the timing/immediacy of support that children receive during the read-aloud (e.g., building in-text scaffolds such as use of pictures or props); and
- the explicit attention to vocabulary.

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

These adjustments are effective ways to adapt or individualize instruction for diverse learners. Rather than simply suggest teachers make these adjustments on their own, the *Supplemental Guides* provide fully developed lessons that illustrate these adjustments.

The grade 3 CKLA materials are presently being revised so that supports for ELLs will be integrated as part of the core teacher guide. The revised materials will be completed in late spring 2015.

How do you differentiate instruction for students who are reading on different levels?

Skills instruction is differentiated based on each student's needs, which are identified through a comprehensive placement test at the beginning of the year in grades 1–3, as well as frequent formal and informal assessments throughout the year.

In K–3, the CKLA Skills materials use a multifaceted approach to ensure that every student masters the decoding skills needed to become a proficient reader. First and foremost, *the Skills lessons and materials, including the student readers, were created using an explicit, systematic scope and sequence of letter-sound correspondences and phonics skills developed by the Core Knowledge Foundation*. There is no single, universally accepted sequence of instruction of letter-sound correspondences; however, the Foundational Skills section of the Common Core State Standards, which is supported by an overwhelming body of research, calls for instruction and materials in the early grades that provide explicit, systematic teaching and practice of these skills to ensure that all students have the fundamental competencies needed to become proficient readers. The CKLA Skills materials are structured to provide time for repetition, extra support, remediation, and/or enrichment as needed.

The skills in the later part of the CKLA decoding sequence assume mastery of the earlier, prerequisite skills. Therefore, the teacher's goal and focus is always to ensure that students master the skills in each unit before proceeding to the next unit of instruction.

To this end, teachers make use of frequent formal and informal assessments of students' progress. Beginning in kindergarten, instructional time and materials are explicitly allocated for assessment; differentiated instruction is then provided on the basis of these assessments. While highly scaffolded whole group instruction of the specific letter-sound correspondence(s) under study is a part of every Skills lesson, opportunities for small group instruction are also included. Guidance and materials to support students needing additional instruction and practice, as well as additional text selections for students ready for a challenge, are included in each unit.

Detailed guidance is provided to assist teachers in administering and analyzing the formative assessments included at the end of each Skills unit. Teachers are encouraged to pause before proceeding to the next unit if the formative assessment data suggest that students have not mastered the skills taught. To bring all students to mastery, additional materials are included in the optional Pausing Point for each unit, as well as in the *Assessment and Remediation Guide* for each grade level.

In grades 1–3, a placement test is used in the beginning of the year as an important screening tool to assist teachers in differentiating which students are ready for Skills instruction on grade

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

level and which students may lack the prerequisite skills. Those who are not ready are regrouped for skills instruction beginning at an earlier point in the CKLA Skills strand. Students may lack these skills for a variety of reasons, including being new to CKLA, perhaps having used different approaches and/or instructional materials in earlier grades, failure to have thoroughly mastered the previous year’s skills, and/or regression over the summer break. Whatever the reason, it is important to identify knowledge gaps at the start of the year and address them (rather than pushing students ahead through grade level materials simply because they have been placed in that grade).

Detailed guidance is provided to assist teachers in analyzing and interpreting each student’s performance on the placement test. All teachers in a given grade level then meet to review the placement test results for all students in that grade. Using the criteria specified in the CKLA Teacher Guides, teachers then regroup students for Skills instruction only across all teachers within the grade level to create classroom groupings of students with similar skills in each classroom. The CKLA Teacher Guides at the various grade levels show teachers where to start in the CKLA sequence of decoding instruction and which materials to use for the particular students in their classes.

In grades 4–5, there are many opportunities to differentiate instruction. Differentiation is often provided through small-group reading lessons. Small group 1 should include students who need extra scaffolding and support from you in order to read and comprehend the text, and complete a related activity. Small group 2 should include students who are capable of reading and comprehending the text without your guided support. These students may work as a small group, as partners, or independently to read the chapter, discuss it with others in their group, and then complete an activity page. Over the course of the year, students may move from one group to the other, depending on individual students’ needs.

In addition, there are optional questions, activities, and information labeled Support and Challenge throughout the lessons. Please use these Support and Challenge opportunities to address the needs of your class and individual students.

Each unit also concludes with a Pausing Point for differentiation of instruction. Pausing Points provide opportunities for remediation and enrichment based on the results of the unit assessment as well as students’ performance across the unit. Teachers may wish to provide remediation or enrichment opportunities to individual students, small groups, or the whole class, based on students’ needs.

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

Implementation

How do I use the CKLA K–3 Listening & Learning (L&L) kits in conjunction with another ELA program?

Ideally, the Listening & Learning read-alouds can be used during science and social studies time.

If you have a mandated ELA program and cannot use the Listening & Learning strand during the ELA block, then Listening & Learning can be used in the social studies and/or science blocks. In this case, the rich read-alouds of the Listening & Learning strand would be used as the primary means of content delivery. Teachers are encouraged to supplement this content with social studies and science projects that will introduce young learners to the different methods of inquiry central to each discipline.

How long does it take to implement CKLA?

From preschool through fifth grade, the time needed for CKLA ranges from 45 to 150 minutes per day.

CKLA Preschool provides engaging, developmentally appropriate plans for infusing 45 minutes of daily instruction into activities that are common in high-quality preschool classrooms. For example, guidance is given for conducting activities during arrival time, morning circle, learning centers, small groups, whole group, book readings, and transition times (i.e., when students move between activities).

In K–3, CKLA provides approximately 160 days of instruction (the exact number of days varies, depending on how much time teachers decide to devote to pausing for reinforcement and remediation). In K–2, each day of instruction involves 120 minutes of dedicated language arts time. For grade 3, CKLA instruction requires 150 minutes of instructional time. This time will comprehensively address all language arts objectives and will comprehensively address all of the Common Core State Standards related to language arts.

Because the Listening & Learning strand contains so much science and social studies content, some schools choose to dedicate most of their science and social studies time to teaching CKLA.

Although the Listening & Learning strand can be broken into pieces (i.e., not requiring 60 straight minutes), the Skills strand requires a full 60 minute block of time. Within the Skills strand, there is whole group instruction, small group/individual time (varying by lesson), and independent work (some writing, some reading). It is a comprehensive strand that fully supports children learning to read and write and that is why it requires the dedicated time.

In 4–5, CKLA requires 90 minutes per day and approximately 150 days of instruction. The lessons begin with a 45-minute reading block that emphasizes building knowledge, vocabulary,

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

and reading comprehension; the remaining 45 minutes improve students' writing, grammar, morphology, and/or spelling.

If we use a Smartboard while teaching the K–3 Listening & Learning strand, can we display the text so teachers can read off the projected image, rather than the anthology?

It is recommended that teachers display the images that accompany the read-alouds, but not the text in the Listening & Learning anthologies.

The purpose of the Listening & Learning strand is to support young children's oral language development and background knowledge. The emphasis is on listening to and discussing the rich, complex texts that teachers read aloud. While some very advanced students may be capable of reading some of these texts, the texts in Listening & Learning are not meant to be decodable for young children. For young children who are just beginning to read, it is difficult to ignore text that is displayed, so displaying this text may distract them from listening. By developing their listening ability, children learn vocabulary, acquire knowledge, and practice focusing their attention. They also become good listeners, which is an important skill in own right.

We acknowledge that there is a learning process for teachers in using these materials, as there is for any new program that is adopted. However, those using the materials tell us that most teachers are able to easily adapt to the format of reading from the anthology and using the flip book or displayed images. This approach ensures that children's attention is directed where it will be most beneficial—on the rich language and content of the read-aloud.

Should teachers replace and/or supplement the read-alouds in the K–3 Listening & Learning strand to match their students' interests?

Teachers are encouraged to supplement the read-alouds, but they should be very cautious about replacing read-alouds.

The read-alouds in each **domain in the Listening & Learning strand** have been carefully written to build students' knowledge and vocabulary. Likewise, the domains within and across grades have been carefully constructed so as to strategically reinforce and extend students' knowledge and vocabulary. While some of these cross-domain connections are obvious—such as the series of domains on the human body—others are not obvious. For example, in first grade, the Astronomy domain teaches students about the phases of the moon. In second grade, that knowledge is refreshed and extended in the Early Asian Civilizations domain as children learn about the Chinese New Year, which is based on the lunar calendar.

As teachers get to know the Listening & Learning domains, they will see intentional repetition

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

and expansion of concepts and vocabulary throughout the program. Therefore, teachers are cautioned to get to know the program very well before replacing any of the read-alouds. Supplementing, in contrast, is always welcome. Not only do all of the teacher guides have suggestions for additional readings, the Pausing Points and Extensions provide time for meeting students' needs and pursuing their interests.

Beyond the core CKLA materials, how can we enhance implementation?

Although CKLA does not require supplements, purchasing some trade books and teacher guides as well as providing time for collaboration and professional development could enhance implementation.

Core Knowledge Language Arts is a comprehensive P–5 ELA curriculum that does not require any supplements (even the trade books required for implementation are included in the classroom kits). However, for those schools or districts interested in investing in additional resources as a means of enhancing implementation, we provide the following list of considerations. These are not required for high-fidelity use of the CKLA program, but they may help schools and districts determine best use of funds:

- Purchasing 5–10 additional trade books per domain for each classroom will serve as a wonderful, additional resource to the read-alouds provided within the anthologies. Teachers can use the recommended list shown in each domain's introduction. Please note that we recommend far more titles than teachers will have the opportunity to use because we encourage teachers to customize CKLA for their students; there is certainly no need to buy everything.
- Purchasing large maps of the U.S. and the world, if these are not already available in each classroom, will support the various history-based domains in the program.
- Purchasing a pocket chart (free standing is nice, but not necessary) for each kindergarten and first grade classroom, as well as blank index cards (100 per month for each class) and chart paper will facilitate delivery of the Skills strand of the program.
- Purchasing one *Alphabet Jam* CD (per classroom; available on [Amazon](#) and iTunes) will facilitate delivery of some of the kindergarten lessons.
- Purchasing handheld speech mirrors (one per child) for kindergarten classes will facilitate teaching sounds in the Skills strand of the program.
- Purchasing the [***What Your—Grader Needs to Know***](#) book or the [***Core Knowledge Teacher Handbook***](#) for teachers will provide an additional source of background information for the content covered in the program. Both are available from the Core Knowledge Foundation.
- Ensuring that grade level teachers have unencumbered common planning time several times a week will facilitate preparation for the various units and lessons of the program.
- Including funds for substitute teachers and travel so that teachers can observe other teachers implementing CKLA will provide opportunities for exchanging ideas and strategies that may enhance delivery of the program.

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

- Including funds and/or release time for teachers within a district to meet with their grade level peers one to three times per year to share successes and ideas, brainstorm around challenges, and plan jointly for upcoming lessons and units may enhance delivery of the program.
- Hiring a dedicated district-wide coordinator and/or school-based coordinator to support program implementation and fidelity will provide teachers with the best possible support and guidance.
- Identifying an outstanding classroom teacher and providing regular release time from classroom duties for this teacher to support other teachers within the same building will also enhance implementation.

Can CKLA be used in conjunction with other language arts programs?

No additional ELA program is needed. Any program paired with CKLA should supplement—not interfere with—the time needed to fully implement CKLA.

It is not necessary to pair CKLA with any other program; CKLA comprehensively addresses all language arts standards in the Common Core. Having said that, some teachers want to maintain certain practices they have used within their language arts time, even as they fully adopt CKLA. Whenever you work to pair programs it is important that the programs being used are implemented with fidelity. For CKLA in K–2, 120 minutes need to be dedicated to CKLA; in grade 3, 150 minutes are needed; and in 4–5, 90 minutes are needed. Scheduling always requires trade-offs; when considering whether to pair CKLA with other programs, it may be useful to consider adding in materials that are not redundant with CKLA, but rather complementary.

What should we do with our leveled reading libraries after we adopt CKLA?

Schools are encouraged to maintain their leveled libraries and to invite children to select books from them to read in addition to their CKLA readers.

Especially for children with limited access to books outside of school, these leveled libraries serve the critical purpose of giving children opportunities to pursue their interests through reading. However the Common Core Standards and the latest research suggest that student-selected leveled readers are best used as supplements and that instructional time be devoted to ensuring that students become fluent, automatic decoders and to building knowledge and vocabulary.

One option is to add guided reading and accountable independent reading (GRAIR) to the school day or week. This is a time in addition to the instructional time for CKLA in which children’s choice in reading (and perhaps writing) is promoted. It is a time to support children

FAQs: Core Knowledge Language Arts K–5

accessing volumes of texts aligned to their interests, at or slightly above their level, and for engaged reading (or writing). This option has the practical benefit that the GRAIR time can vary as needed from day to day or week to week.

To learn more about how to use leveled readers and GRAIR in a way that is aligned with the Common Core Standards, please see this [paper](#), which is available for free on the EngageNY website. One of the authors of this paper, David Liben, is a leader in curricula for language arts. David Liben worked closely with the architects of the Common Core Standards to review relevant research and theory related to early reading development.